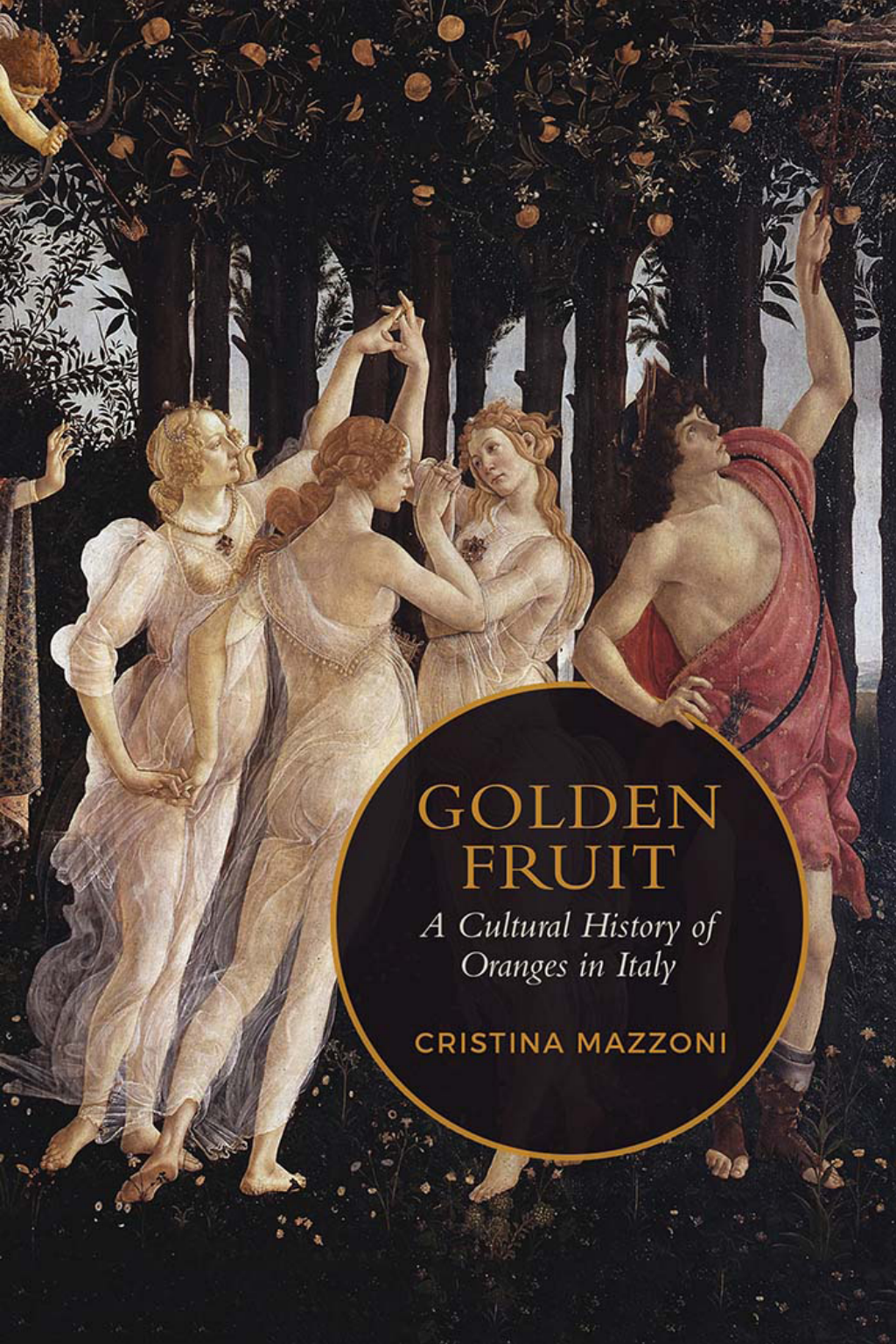




GOLDEN FRUIT

*A Cultural History of
Oranges in Italy*

CRISTINA MAZZONI

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*For my daughter Sophia,
who senses when an orange is being peeled
and quietly comes near*

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Unless otherwise noted, all translations throughout this book are mine. For helping me translate Ferrari's complicated Latin in his *Hesperides*, and for so much of what makes me happy in this life, I am joyfully indebted to my husband, John Cirignano.

I do not remember how I learned to peel citrus fruit in the Italian way (a description of this process may be found in my introduction), but I do have clear memories of my mother, Stefania, peeling mounds of oranges for her husband and six children after dinner; I am grateful to her for passing on this skill, a short chapter in my long list of debts to her. John, Paul, Gemma, and Sophia Cirignano have been the eager and grateful recipients of peeled oranges for many years now; without their enthusiastic eating I would not be so proficient at this art or, without their lively and constant presence, at the far more important art of loving.

My own attempts to teach Americans how to peel oranges like an Italian does have mostly failed. The one hope is my youngest child, Sophia; in this, as in many other aspects of her life, she knows that the secret is to apply just the right amount of pressure. It is to her that I dedicate this book.

GOLDEN FRUIT

A Cultural History of Oranges in Italy

INTRODUCTION



How to Peel an Orange

In Franco Brusati's film *Bread and Chocolate* (*Pane e cioccolata*, 1974) the beloved Roman actor Nino Manfredi plays an Italian immigrant to Switzerland who has taken a job as a waiter at an upscale restaurant. When a stodgy, German-speaking diner distractedly orders an orange, Nino visibly panics, and film viewers know very well why: serving an orange in this particular establishment requires peeling it by means of an elegant and complicated procedure that Nino has not yet mastered. The technique involves the deft use of fork and knife, and viewers of the movie have already observed another waiter effortlessly perform it over a porcelain plate, through Nino's daunted eyes. Spellbound, Nino had observed the artistic results of his colleague's efforts – the various sections of the orange peeling magically open up like a blooming flower at the end of the waiter's scoring tour de force. When he tried to imitate this artistry, the orange flew off the plate and onto the restaurant floor. Nino tries to change the mind of the German-speaking customer about what fruit he might prefer by offering him strawberries. He does this in Italian, however, a language that the snobbish customer does not know or seem interested in understanding. These attempts to change the customer's language and fruit preference fail. Nino then asks to be excused for a minute, goes to the back of the restaurant, and, under the wide-open eyes of a flabbergasted Swiss cashier, roughly peels the orange with his teeth by biting off and spitting out one chunk of rind at a time, including

the stem, hastily facilitating his dental performance with the work of his fingers. Nino then places the now-peeled fruit inside the perfect flower-shaped peel that has been prepared by his co-worker and discarded by a previous customer – a paragon of Italian ingenuity and a personification of the resourcefulness so often born of necessity. In the words of a critic, Nino “is generous, inventive and creative, as we see in the restaurant scenes, when he ... ‘borrows’ a perfect orange peel from a more skilled colleague” (Cavallaro 27).

Obviously oranges are not native to Switzerland, nor do they grow there, because of the inhospitable climate of that northern, landlocked nation. This agricultural circumstance is useful in understanding how Brusati’s restaurant scene highlights the fact that, when it comes to exotic or foreign foods, “the paraphernalia surrounding their consumption (presentation, table manners, menu, etc.) are developed not to enhance the enjoyment of the food, but to enhance the message of exclusivity” (Veen 415). Nino’s Italian working-class technique of peeling oranges – much like his friendliness and talkative nature, his attachment to his family, and his selfless generosity – sets him apart from his German-speaking co-workers, many of whom are also immigrants but have adapted (though clearly do not belong) to the cultural practices of the wealthy upper classes in Switzerland. Nino’s orange-peeling performance, when contrasted with that of his German-speaking colleague, provides a microcosm of the protagonist’s alienation throughout the movie. That orange, alone, tells a complicated story that includes, among other things, food practices and social class, a nation’s wealth and an immigrant’s need, and the signals of cultural belonging or exclusion. From this perspective the orange scene includes all the major elements of the film as a whole.

Switzerland was a common destination in the 1970s for unemployed Italians in search of work, and Brusati’s film (a typical *commedia all’italiana*, “Italian-style comedy,” a genre characterized by its combination of humour and social criticism) has been said to depict “the difficulties of a migrant’s life in a foreign environment, and the loss of identity that a person may experience when trying to conform to societal norms” (Cavallaro 25). Brusati’s film was “a hit in Italy and throughout the world. It was a bizarre, surreal, kaffian ballad about racism in ‘civilized’ Switzerland and the atopia of an Italian emigrant who is not allowed to live – let alone belong – anywhere” (Brunetta 339). The bread of the title, representing the staff of life, is the basic staple food necessary for survival and recalls the work of Italian migrants; whereas the chocolate that accompanies the simple bread is a luxury item that stands for Swiss

wealth. The restaurant scene, specifically, might as well have been titled “Bread and Oranges,” for oranges, like chocolate, are represented as a luxury food, one deserving of specialized treatment. The added irony of this scene, however, is that – unlike the distant, Swiss-produced chocolate of the title – the fruit Nino is unable to peel “correctly” is likely to come from his own country, a major producer of oranges in Europe. Oranges have been very important to Italian identity across the centuries, as we will see in the rest of this book, and yet ironically it is the handling of this very fruit, the product of his southern land, that causes this Italian immigrant to be fired. Nino performs in the orange-peeling scene of the film his social class and ethnic identity through a specific bodily act, as on a theatrical stage, and we understand this orange peeling as a metonymy, as a part representing a whole, as one slice of an overall cultural performance that is destined to fail.

Performance is a concept that recurs often in contemporary discussions of identity. The American philosopher Judith Butler has famously claimed that gender, for one, is not a stable identity but rather “is instituted through a stylized repetition of acts”: through bodily gestures and movements, through performance, the illusion of an abiding gendered self comes about (“Performative Acts” 519). Gender, for Butler, is an effect produced by our movements and gestures, a theory that makes it unsubstantial and subject to transformation; gender, for this philosopher, is not a stable identity but an illusion. Ethnic identity too, in many ways, could be defined as a stylized repetition of acts, and much of what Butler says about gender – that it is a performance and not a stable identity and that this performance does not simply reveal gender but actually constitutes it – applies to ethnicity: ethnic identity may also be said to be “instituted through a stylized repetition of acts.” Butler herself notes the impossibility of distinguishing our various identities when she writes that “gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities” (*Gender Trouble* 3), and others have applied this notion, originally developed by Butler about gender, to identities that are racial, class, ethnic, sexual, or regional.¹ Even the way one peels oranges is a performance that belongs to Butler’s “citational chain,” or what she calls “the compulsion to install an identity through repetition” (*Bodies That Matter* 220) – a stylized gesture confirming that cultural identity is a matter of doing and not of being.

There is a dark side, however, to this narrative of cultural belonging, as anyone watching *Bread and Chocolate* quickly realizes in spite of the frequent laughter induced by the film’s humour. Just as, about gender,

Butler explains that “as a strategy of survival, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences” – gender performance, that is, always takes place under a “situation of duress” (“Performative Acts” 522) – so also the ethnic performance expected of Brusati’s protagonist in *Bread and Chocolate* turns bad; not all of Nino’s actions can be concealed as effectively as his unorthodox peeling of the orange, for his performance does not reiterate the proper norms, it does not cite convention properly. Instead, Nino performs an irremediably Italian and working-class identity, and, predictably, he loses his restaurant job. At the end of the movie the likeable protagonist is forced to return to his native Italy, with his proverbial tail between his legs.

In Brusati’s fancy Swiss restaurant it is the waiter’s job to peel the diner’s orange: admittedly, oranges can be a mess to peel, leaving hands sticky with sugary juice and greasy with citrus oils – why not delegate the task if possible? Those living in countries where oranges are plentiful and form a staple of the daily diet when they are in season, have nevertheless managed to devise effective ways of peeling and eating these succulent globes, ways that, to this day, do not seem to have made it to colder climes. I make this observation because my own academic interest in citrus fruit started with the peeling of oranges in the winter of 2007. It was my first winter in Italy in close to three decades, and the first opportunity in as many years to peel oranges in the way everyone else around me did, or at least a way with which everyone was very familiar. As oranges are a winter fruit in Italy, my academically cadenced summer travels had not afforded me the opportunity to peel them when surrounded by Italians. What I noticed, during that winter in Italy, was that no one commented on the way I peeled my oranges. In the United States, whenever I peel oranges in front of someone else for the first time, I get a reaction of some sort: “Oh, that’s an interesting way to peel an orange,” or, “Those Italians, they always do things with style, even when they peel their fruit.” The most discreet witnesses simply let their gaze linger over the movements of my hands; I have learned to notice such lingering and to prepare for the questions and comments that are sure to come, or to offer my own explanation if it seems appropriate. In the winter of 2007 no one was making this type of comment any more, nor was anyone staring at my orange peeling. Everyone else was peeling oranges in the way I did, or at least they saw their mothers peel oranges in the way I did, and what they saw me do when I was confronted with an orange and a knife did not give them pause.

My orange peeling is a process that is much easier to demonstrate than to describe in words – after all, as a Mrs Jane Aster put it in her etiquette book of 1882, “the art of peeling an orange so as to hold its own juice, and its own sugar too, is one that can scarcely be taught in a book” (292) – but I will try. With a sharp knife I make a shallow cut in the shape of a circle around the stem end, and another just like it around the blossom end, prying away and discarding each piece of orange peel after the end of each scoring mark. I then score about a half-dozen lines, connecting the two already-peeled circles at the two ends, and pry away and discard each section after scoring it. It always feels satisfying when, as I score the last one, these longitudinal cuts turn out to have been evenly spaced, so that one does not end up with an especially narrow or excessively wide section of peel at the end. However, care with the knife, and sensitivity to its pressure on the fruit, are imperative throughout this process; the cuts need to be deep enough to make the subsequent prying away of the peel as easy as possible, but not so deep as to cut through the membrane into the pulp – otherwise the juice oozes out, and hands get sticky, which is precisely the disaster that the use of the knife is meant to prevent in the first place. It takes much practice and the right kind of orange to get this part just right; navel oranges work better than do Valencia oranges, for example, because the thinner rind of the latter sticks more stubbornly to the juicy flesh. Of course, there are many situations in which oranges must be peeled and there is no knife available, so that hands must be used – and, possibly, a well-placed initial bite into the rind, like Nino Manfredi’s in *Bread and Chocolate*. Nevertheless, the scoring-and-prying method, laborious though it may seem, is a well-known one among Italians and is preferred by many because, once one knows how to do it properly, it is quick and clean. Even those Italians who may not personally use this method do not really notice it when they see it being used by others, because it is so common. It is not considered particularly fanciful or elegant; it is just the way you peel an orange if you have grown up in Italy and a knife is available. It is how you perform Italianness through orange peeling. But in the United States, in the company of Americans, people around me stare when they see this method in action. They make comments. They ask why and how. They say that Italians are more elegant with fruit, and food, and life in general. Sometimes the more academic among my literary friends raise that beloved Renaissance word, *sprezzatura* (to perform difficult acts while making them seem easy). “You peel oranges with such *sprezzatura*,” I have been told.

Americans' curiosity for my method of peeling oranges piqued my own scholarly interest both in this fruit's ability to signal ethnic identity, as Nino's and my own experience confirm, and, more generally, in the close cultural bond that oranges entertain with my native Italy. Today's worldwide production of citrus fruit is dominated by large countries such as Brazil and China, with the oranges from the European Union sharing the third place (United States Department of Agriculture), but until the second half of the twentieth century, and in less quantifiable ways still today, citrus fruit were associated with the Mediterranean basin and especially with Italy and Spain. Giaré and Giuca give a number of explanations for this loss of primacy, including globalization, the internationalization and increased efficiency of Italy's competitors (Spain, Brazil, and the United States), and structural problems in Italy's most productive citrus-growing areas, namely Sicily (over 60 per cent of Italy's total citrus harvest) and Calabria (over 20 per cent) – whose production is not as standardized as the market requires it to be (8).

My initial reading forays into the stories of oranges in Italy quickly proved rewarding and left me wanting more. I kept finding oranges in poetry and in prose, in fiction and in non-fiction, in art, in journalism, and even in popular music and television commercials. The appeal of these citrus-centred texts and images, like that of a juicy and fresh orange itself, was hard to resist, for it enticed my personal and my professional skills at once and drew me in. The role of oranges in Italy, it soon became clear to me, went well beyond a personal anecdote, touching instead a variety of cultural expressions through the centuries; clearly there was more than serendipity in my selection of oranges as the subject of a scholarly pursuit, more than personal coincidence. *Golden Fruit*, then, aims to detail the ways in which a critical attention to oranges in certain citrus-centred Italian cultural expressions (verbal and visual, artistic and popular) allows the emergence of a deeper understanding of each of these texts as a whole. At the same time, the oranges in these diverse texts play eclectic roles that cannot be properly understood without an awareness of their geographical and historical context.

The word *eclectic* is crucial to my argument and to the diversity of the orange-centred texts included in this book. Among fruit metaphors, oranges provide indeed an extraordinarily diverse set of possibilities. Surely there are many important fruits in Italy, and the Mediterranean basin is well known for its agricultural abundance. Fruits such as grapes, figs, pomegranates, and apricots are unique to year-round temperate climates, unlike, for example, some of the other fruits mentioned in

this book, including apples, pears, peaches, and melons, all of which even grow where I now live and work, in far-from-temperate northern Vermont. Grapes, figs, pomegranates, and apricots have been an important part of Mediterranean economic, culinary, and, more generally, cultural history and are mentioned in such ancient texts as the Hebrew Bible and in Greco-Roman myths. The pomegranate, for example, in European culture was always the fruit of the dead, as well as a symbol of fertility because of the abundance of its seeds. Persephone ate six of its plump grains and was forever condemned to spend six months a year in the underworld. The pomegranate, so common in the Christ-child's hands in European paintings, symbolizes his suffering and resurrection, as in Sandro Botticelli's *Madonna of the Pomegranate* (ca 1487).² Grapes, likewise, are symbolically "taken," inevitably tied as they are with wine as both inebriation and, in the Catholic world, sacrament. Figs, with their inescapable, sexual double entendre, evoke female genitals in Italian, as they did in ancient Greece. And apricots, however delightful to the eye and to the palate, make only sporadic appearances in cultural productions: their season is short, and they do not travel well.

Oranges, by comparison to these ancient fruits, are relative newcomers to the Italian and, generally, the European scene, and once they had arrived, they were free for the symbolic taking, so to speak. Their image could lend itself to a number of uses partly because their significance, unlike that of grapes, figs, and pomegranates, for example, was not yet codified by the time literature in Italian had started to develop in the Middle Ages. It is an interesting coincidence that the traditional date for the introduction of oranges in Italy, with Dominic of Guzmán's gift of an orange tree to Pope Innocent III in 1216 (a gift and an orange tree to which I return in [chapter 1](#)), roughly coincides with the writing of the first literary text in the Italian vernacular by a known author. Francis of Assisi's poem "Cantico di Frate Sole" ("Canticle of Brother Sun") was composed some time before 1226. Italian literature, which so often turns to oranges over the centuries, came into its own at almost the same time that this beloved fruit arrived and spread throughout the peninsula. By a fortunate coincidence, the later Middle Ages also saw the increased popularity of fruit in general, with sources documenting "an increase in cultivation of fruit trees from the beginning of the thirteenth century," an increase related to the spread of "a more demanding and refined dietary regimen. Limes, lemons, and bitter oranges were grown in the Italian Mezzogiorno in larger and larger quantities throughout the thirteenth century"; this was made possible by the emergence of the right market,

namely “a wealthier social class able to afford products that were still considered superfluous (and therefore tokens of privilege). Peasants in the country, living at subsistence level, ate very little fruit throughout the Middle Ages” (Cortonesi 271).

The first citrus fruit to come to Europe was the citron, from which the generic name *citrus* is derived, and the first reference to this fruit in Europe appears in the writings of Theophrastus (*Enquiry into Plants*, ca 313 BCE): “Media and Persia have, among many others, that which is called the ‘Median’ or ‘Persian apple’ (citron) ... The ‘apple’ is not eaten, but it is very fragrant ... if the ‘apple’ is placed among clothes, it keeps them from being moth-eaten. It is also useful when one has drunk deadly poison; for being given in wine it upsets the stomach and brings up the poison; also for producing sweetness of breath” (311–13; bk. IV, ch. IV).³ Virgil and Pliny describe the citron, which was producing fruit in the warmer parts of Italy by the middle of the first century CE (Ramón-Laca 506) and was known as *Citrus medica* because Europeans first found it in Media (corresponding roughly to the northwestern portion of present-day Iran). Citrons in antiquity remained uncommon and expensive; Diocletian’s edict of 301 CE, for example, fixed the maximum price of a melon at two denarii and the maximum price of a citron at twenty-four denarii (Isaac 185). Still, we cannot be sure just how familiar ancient Italy was with citrus fruit other than citrons or how well they actually knew even citrons: “Vergil may have seen the tree without recognizing it as the Persian fruit tree. Varro would have known it only as an ornamental plant. Columella would scarcely have accepted it as a tree of any commercial importance. Pliny may well have seen citron trees in the vicinity of Pompeii, an area with which he was very familiar, and, like Vergil, failed to identify them for what they were” (Andrews 42).

The representation of citrus fruit other than citrons, however, such as the lemons and oranges that are visible on a few frescoes and mosaics in Rome and Pompeii, is not accompanied by any written evidence, although it is possible that in the ancient world the word for citron may have also referred to other types of citrus fruit, such as lemons and oranges.⁴ It is in the work of Arabic authors that we first see mention, in Europe, of different kinds of citrus fruit, and, in fact, most of the citrus names in European languages (other than *citron*, that is) come from the Arabic spoken in the Iberian peninsula (Ramón-Laca 511). Most notably, the Arabs brought the Sanskrit name for the orange, *narangah*, into the Mediterranean region through its Persian version, *naranj*. Crusaders returning from the Holy Land in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries also

contributed to the spread of citrus fruit in Italy, and a variety of citrus fruit, including oranges, were present across the peninsula by the 1300s (Giarè and Giuca 14–15). The word *naranj* was, in turn, the source of the Italian *naranzia*, *narancia*, and eventually *arancio*, along with the neo-Latin version still used in botanical terminology, *aurantium* (Andrews 46). The creation of the word *aurantium* was likely also influenced by the resemblance of the Persian word *naranj* to the Latin *aurum*, gold – a colour repeatedly associated with oranges, as we will see.⁵ It could be said that in some ways oranges and culture in the Italian vernacular grew up together.

The golden fruit that gives my book its title has received several names over the centuries, and therefore a word about botanical terminology is in order here. As I note in more than one context in the following chapters, citrus nomenclature has been since its inception marked by uncertainty and misunderstandings, including, rather surprisingly, a recurrent mistaken identification of the cedar, a conifer, with the citron. Even today there are lingering issues in the scientific classification of citrus fruit. In addition to oranges, I will refer in this book to other citrus fruit, such as bergamot (*Citrus bergamia*), citron (*Citrus medica*), grapefruit (*Citrus paradisi*), Key lime (*Citrus aurantifolia*), lemon (*Citrus limon*), mandarin (*Citrus reticulata*), and pummelo (*Citrus grandis*). I will also bring up a citrus fruit that is little known today but was quite popular in early modern Italy, Adam's apple (*Citrus lumia*, var. *pomum Adami*). However, it is the names for oranges that have proved to be the most confusing. When speaking simply of oranges today, we mean sweet oranges (*Citrus sinensis*), whether they be the large and popular navel oranges, the thin-skinned Valencia oranges, or the more unusual blood oranges; all are varieties of sweet oranges that may be easily peeled and immediately eaten out of hand (*pace* the intricate peeling method of Nino's German-speaking colleague in *Bread and Chocolate*). Their name in modern Italian is *arance*, and their Latin name, *Citrus sinensis*, derives from the word for China, where sweet oranges were thought to originate (the German language, by the way, preserves this connection to China in one of its words for orange, *Apfelsine*, as does the Dutch *sinaasappel*). The first oranges to arrive in Europe, however, and for centuries the most common by far, were Seville oranges (*Citrus aurantium*), the ones whose second Latin name, *aurantium*, seems to allude to the Latin word for gold, *aurum*. Today Seville oranges are usually called bitter or sour oranges: sour describes the flesh of this orange, its acidity, whereas bitter refers to the taste of the essential oils present in the rind. In early modern Italy these oranges were usually called *melangoli*

(sometimes declined in the feminine, *melangole*) or *melarance*, “orange apples,” because of their resemblance in terms of shape and size to a much better known fruit, apples (in Italian, *mele*).

Golden Fruit examines the enduring presence of oranges in Italian culture and the eclectic ways in which this fruit works in, and helps us to understand, a number of very different cultural expressions – from a saint’s letter to a television commercial – produced in different time periods – from the Middle Ages to the present day. To this end, I have divided the book into four chapters, each with a unique thematic and historical emphasis: the role of oranges in texts about physical and spiritual health in early modern Italy, and how this role shapes a medieval holy woman’s written words to the pope; citrus fruit as a symbol of romantic love in early modern artistic and literary representations, especially a Renaissance long poem in Latin and a baroque fairy tale in Neapolitan; the comparison of women and oranges as hybrids of sorts, in a botanical treatise from the seventeenth century and in related texts that precede and follow it; and the coming together of oranges, violence, and the sacred in late-nineteenth-century ethnography and the literary fairy tale it inspired, and the return of this convergence over a century later in popular discourse about the orange harvest. All four chapters turn on oranges and similar citrus fruit as a privileged point of access to the texts under consideration, with a critical move that must in turn rely on an awareness of what oranges were and what they meant in the changing cultural context of the texts themselves. The symbolic and metaphorical uses to which oranges have been put through the ages have varied no less than the more practical aspects of this fruit, such as its flavour, availability, uses, economic value, and kitchen preparation.

Cooking as it relates to citrus fruit, both literally and metaphorically, and the part played by oranges in the spiritual tradition of Christian holy people, are at the heart of my first chapter, titled “Fruit of the Spirit.” After discussing the ambiguous and often dangerous status of fruit in the medieval and early modern understanding of food (Pope Paul II, to give a dramatic example, was thought by some to have died because he had eaten two entire melons), and describing the introduction of oranges to Rome, the chapter goes on to examine in depth the text of a letter from Catherine of Siena to Pope Urban VI, dating from 1379. In this brief but urgent missive Catherine requests that the pope convert his attitude to one of kindness by following a process similar to the one she herself undertook in candying the oranges sent to him as a gift along with the letter: boiling in water to remove bitterness (for water works much like

divine grace); filling with honey to sweeten (honey is the taste equivalent of humility); and gilding the exterior to preserve the inner goodness – be it the literal goodness of a sweet flavour or the more metaphorical goodness of the charitable human being that Catherine entreats Urban VI to become.

Whereas Catherine speaks of divine charity in the first chapter, the next chapter, titled “The Fruit of Love,” centres on a more human and sensuous kind of love, often imaged in early modern European art and literature as a bitter orange. An interpretation of Giorgione’s mysterious painting titled *Double Portrait* (1502), featuring a small and shiny bitter orange between two handsome young men, introduces this second episode on Italian oranges, which focuses on the bond between citrus fruit and romantic love. Early modern oranges were mostly bitter, and, because one of the names used for them was *melangoli*, oranges came to symbolize melancholy (a word that sounds somewhat like “melangoli”) as the foremost expression of lovesickness. This is also the role of citrus fruit in Giovanni Battista Basile’s literary fairy tale “The Three Citrons” (1636). Using citrons as signs of the beauty and fertility of his home region and as the botanical equivalent of the melancholy born of romantic love, Basile drew extensively from Giovanni Gioviano Pontano’s agricultural poem in Latin, *On the Garden of the Hesperides* (1501). Pontano is responsible for the early modern identification of the mythological golden apples found in the Garden of the Hesperides as citrus, thus endowing the relatively new fruit, a symbol of his own region of Naples, where it grew in great abundance, with the allegorical qualities of a mysterious yet ancient and much-revered plant.

In Pontano’s Renaissance poem it is a man, Venus’s beautiful young lover Adonis, who upon his death is turned into a plant, a citrus tree. But, far more often, it is women’s bodies that are likened to plants in narratives and metaphors both past and present, with comparisons that frequently extend into the realm of pregnancy and childbirth and invoke a literary genealogy of metamorphosis. Oranges, during the Italian baroque, provide a unique and eloquent perspective into this perceived affinity. The third chapter, titled “The Fruit of the Womb,” begins with the classical story of Myrrha, who becomes a tree that is pregnant with a child (Adonis himself, as it turns out, Venus’s future lover), in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Myrrha’s predicament provided the inspiration for three myths of botanical transformation written by Giovanni Battista Ferrari for his extensive Latin treatise on citrus fruit, *Hesperides* (1646), a title that clearly points to Pontano’s poem from the previous century. The

focus of this chapter is Ferrari's book, where special attention is given to teratological (namely, monstrous) citrus fruit such as pregnant citrons, lemons, and oranges. The fascination with strangely shaped citrus fruit appears in other seventeenth-century texts as well, and Ferrari's literary myths intend to explain, when his botanical science cannot, the existence of such deformed and fascinating fruit. For example, in the central myth of Ferrari's *Hesperides*, a grieving mother turns into a tree bearing pregnant lemons, upon holding a fingered citron that came from the tree into which her own son had been transformed.

In early modern literary and botanical texts the strangeness of citrus fruit is due to the similarity between its more unusual shapes and the human body, especially the female pregnant body. The "strange fruit" from which [chapter 4](#) takes its name refers instead to the title of a jazz classic from the 1930s, where the expression *strange fruit* describes the body of an African-American man hanging from a tree after having been lynched. This title has been recently reworked by an Italian author to indicate the brutality of which African immigrant workers in the orange groves of southern Italy are often victims; the genealogy of the fruit metaphor provides an effective representation of a violence that is almost unthinkable and, therefore, unwritable. The dualistic and "sacred" nature of oranges, represented as essential to the local economy but also as dangerous precisely for being so precious, emerges through an analysis of the representation of oranges as a valuable commodity in the discourse of literature (Elio Vittorini's *Conversation in Sicily*, 1938–9), of fairy tales (Luigi Capuana's "The Golden Oranges," 1882), of folklore (Giuseppe Pitre's ethnographic essays, 1880s), and of contemporary television commercials. Reading the oranges in these texts from the perspective of violence and the sacred, in turn, helps us to shape an understanding of the 2010 events of the Calabrian city of Rosarno, where bloody riots followed the senseless shooting of several orange pickers from Africa. The literature of oranges lies at the heart of contemporary and non-literary representations of these events.

CHAPTER 1



Fruit of the Spirit: Health, Salvation, and Catherine of Siena's Candied Oranges

The Ambivalent Status of Early Modern Fruit

There is a dessert, in Nigella Lawson's 2004 book *Feast*, called "Flourless Chocolate Orange Cake." It is a moist and gluten-free chocolate concoction with a distinctive citrus tang, and the recipe calls for "thin-skinned" oranges specifically. The cake has no added oils other than ground almonds, an ingredient that is often touted, these days at least, as containing some of the healthiest of fats (however, claims to food healthfulness are now, and perhaps always have been, as fickle as they are persuasive). The recipe for this flourless chocolate cake, from the beautiful British cookbook author who claims to be able to teach you "how to be a domestic goddess" (the title of another one of her books), calls for no fewer than six eggs and plenty of sugar, so that in general Nigella's "Flourless Chocolate Orange Cake" sounds like a normal enough dessert ... until you read the first step of the recipe: "Put the whole oranges in a pan with some cold water, bring to the boil and cook for 2 hours or until soft." (You can find this recipe with a very simple Internet search; it is a popular dessert and frequently reprinted on a variety of websites and blogs.) But what about that initial instruction? Boil "the whole oranges," rinds and all, with no initial preparation other than a perfunctory rinse? And boil them for two full hours?

Boiling oranges whole, though crucial to Nigella's chocolate cake and also a rather standard first step in the making of classic orange marmalade,¹ is not a widespread component of today's typical home preparation of citrus fruit, which more often involves zesting (commonly done in baking), peeling (the peel being chopped, candied, or discarded), squeezing (for juice to be served on its own or used as a seasoning), sectioning (a time-consuming technique reserved for salads and garnishes), and/or slicing (children, in particular, are fond of eating "orange smiles" by biting into the slice of a halved orange and letting the semi-circular rind show between their lips). And yet, boiling *à la Nigella* is just how Catherine of Siena in fourteenth-century Italy describes the preparation of oranges in a letter to Pope Urban VI. Catherine is a household name for her popularity all over Italy and beyond; she is the patron saint of Italy along with Francis of Assisi and, with five other saints, has been charged with protecting the whole of Europe. Catherine of Siena is a household saint rather than, like Nigella, a domestic goddess, although what the two women share, in addition to being "supernatural" role models, includes a predilection for citrus fruit. In her orange letter to the pope Catherine writes about embracing the pleasing flavour of sweetness and especially about a fundamentally ambiguous relationship with the taste of bitterness. Both sweetness and bitterness are part of the experience of citrus fruit today as they were seven hundred years ago, though in different proportions. Catherine was an astute writer as well as a visionary mystic, and the bitterness she describes in her letter, as well as in the rest of her voluminous writings, is literal and metaphorical, botanical and human, desirable and undesirable, raw and cooked. She writes in order to outline and recommend a plan of spiritual sweetening and religious renewal for a pope about whose ability to lead she has some grave concerns. To this end, Catherine resorts to describing real and metaphorical oranges and a recipe for their successful preparation for eating. I will return to her letter in the second half of this chapter after a discussion of the physical and symbolic status of fruit in medieval and Renaissance Italy.

Fruit held an ambivalent position in early modern conceptions of health, as attested by the historical anecdotes and health manuals dating from around the time of Catherine's orange letter to Urban VI. An awareness of this ambivalent position – so different from contemporary assessments of the intrinsic healthfulness of all fresh fruit – should help today's readers to more accurately appreciate the representation of oranges in texts and images from that period. Fruit was considered a delicacy in

early modern Europe, one to which the powerful, both clerical and secular, had easier and more frequent access than did other members of society. Nevertheless, the effects of the consumption of fruit on the human body were not regarded as necessarily desirable. These complications were dramatized when, on 26 July 1471, at the age of fifty-four, Pope Paul II died because of the fruit he had eaten the previous evening: “He very much enjoyed eating melons, crabs, casseroles, fish, and cured pork meat. From this, I believe, came the stroke that killed him: because the day before the night of his death, he had eaten two very large melons” (Molto si dilettaua di mangiare meloni, granchi, pasticci, pesce e carne salata di porco. Di che crederei io, che quella apoplessia, che l’uccise, nascesse: perché il dì precedente alla notte, che egli lasciò la vita, due ben gran meloni si mangiò; Platina, *Le vite de’ pontefici di Bartolomeo Platina* 451). Thus the Italian Renaissance humanist and gastronomist Bartolomeo Sacchi, better known as Platina (1421–81) and as the author of the first printed cookbook in the west – *De honesta voluptate et valetudine* (On honourable pleasure and health) – tells the story of the death of Pietro Barbo, pontiff under the name of Paul II, in his influential history of the lives of the popes, *Le vite de’ pontefici di Bartolomeo Platina cremonese dal Salvator nostro fino a Benedetto XIII*. Paul II is the subject of the last chapter of this volume, and Platina did not much like this pontiff, who was an open enemy of the humanistic studies to which Platina devoted his life (Paul II had even imprisoned and tortured Platina in 1468). The question for the modern reader, however, is a basic one: namely, can someone really die from eating two melons, however large? The pope’s sudden death sounds like a fairy-tale punishment, or a Dantesque *contrappasso* for those whose gluttony got the better of their will and of their soul. Historians agree that in fact Paul II probably died not from an indigestion of melons but rather from a violent death brought on by political enemies. It is nevertheless significant that the excessive eating of melons constituted at Platina’s time a believable cause of death, at least for a pope, and one that could actually be included in an official history of the pontiffs.²

Although today we think of fruit as a good thing to eat and as one of the best foods to safeguard your body’s good health, right up there under such categories as leafy greens and yellow-and-orange vegetables, its status in ancient, medieval, and Renaissance Europe, as the story of Paul II’s death attests, was far more complex and even profoundly ambiguous. Fruit was considered both an aristocratic food, best suited

to the constitution of the noble class, and a dangerous food, one that could make you sick and perhaps even kill you if you ate too much of the wrong kind. Fruit was regarded as a noble food because it usually grew on trees and therefore was located in “high” places, much like aristocrats were located in a “high” place on the social ladder. Plants digested the food absorbed through their roots and turned it into sap, the quality of which improved as “it rose in the plant and produced leaves, flowers, and best of all, fruit. It was even thought that the taller the plants grew, the more the rising sap ‘digested’ and transformed the cold and raw humours of the earth into something more acceptable. Even on the same tree the fruit that was higher off the ground was thought to be better than the rest” (Grieco 309). The status of fruit such as melons and strawberries, however, was complicated by the fact that they grew close to the ground and therefore near lowly produce such as turnips, garlic, and onions, which were generally regarded as fit only for peasants and the poor.³ The pervasiveness of the metaphorical process in daily, and not just poetic, language, and even in our very ways of thinking about the world, becomes obvious in this context with its social, dietary, and medical ramifications.

Metaphors of literally and figuratively high status notwithstanding, fruit was generally viewed with suspicion in the pre-scientific era, ultimately on the basis of the theory of the four humours – a set of principles also known as humorism, humoralism, or humoral theory. Systemized in ancient Greece and dominant throughout early modern medical practice in Europe, humoral theory categorized fruit in general as too “cold” and “moist” for the human body, the health of which was thought to depend on the balance of the four liquids, or humours, flowing within it. As Platina himself presciently warns, in his cookbook written in 1465 while Pope Paul II was still alive, the melon is dangerous “because of its coldness mixed with wetness” (*per la sua frigiditate messadata a la humiditate; De honesta voluptate IX*).⁴ The four humours discussed by humoral theory included blood, yellow bile, phlegm, and black bile. Each of these humours corresponded to a physical and psychological temperament. If blood dominated, the person would be sanguine, and this was regarded, in moderation, as the normative temperament of the healthy human being; hot and moist, as well as courageous, hopeful, and loving. Too much yellow bile made one bilious or choleric: hot and dry, easily angered, and bad tempered. An excess of phlegm meant that the person would be phlegmatic: cold and moist, or calm and unemotional. Too much black bile was the cause of melancholy: cold and dry, as well as despondent

and irritable. A desirable temperament and good health are achieved when these four humours are in balance, whereas too much or too little of any of the humours was likely to lead to disease. Diet, it was believed, contributed to this balance or to its absence.⁵

As our bodies are different from one another in their humoral composition, certain people benefit more from certain foods than from others, in general, and the social class into which one was born, as well as other factors such as gender and one's typical daily activities, helped determine one's ideal diet. However, there was also a wide-ranging attempt on the part of cooks to make dishes that were balanced and thus, at the very least, not harmful, if not downright beneficial, to most eaters. Early modern cooking involved rules that applied to particular foods or even particular fruit. Platina, after describing the cold and wet nature of melons, for example, warns about the dangers of eating them on a full stomach and recommends that they be eaten at the start of a meal: "For this reason, our ancestors ordered that we eat melons on an empty stomach and avoid any other food until they have settled at the bottom of our stomach" (*Per questa cagione dali nostri maggiori è stato commandato che noi mangiamo il meloni a degiuno stomacho & dobbiamo sopra sedere da laltro cibo dum mente che li sia andati a residere i fundo del stomacho; De honesta voluptate VIII–IX*).

Fruit in general was described as cold and moist, in humoral theory. This makes better sense if we keep in mind that fruit in the early modern period, not having been manipulated through hybridization, grafting, and crossbreeding as much as has the fruit found these days at the supermarket – much less, genetically modified – was less sweet than it is today and much closer to its wild origins. In order for the human body, which is warm, to absorb such cold food in a healthy way, fruit needed to be made less cold and less moist. This may be accomplished by cooking it, as was done in the process of making candied orange peels, not to mention applesauce, jams, preserves, and pears cooked in wine. Alternately, a similar effect could be achieved by eating fruit with a dry and hot food such as meat or with a drink such as wine. Platina recommends the latter in the case of melons: "nature, after we eat melons, desires excellent wine, which is almost certainly an antidote: namely, a medicine against the coldness of the melon" (*la natura, la quale doppo il mangiare del melone appetisse vino ottimo il quale è quasi certo antidoto: cioè la medicina contra la frigiditate del melone; De honesta voluptate X*). The application of the theory of humours to the human consumption of fruit is the origin of such winning and enduring Italian gastronomic combinations as the

pairing of prosciutto and cantaloupe (melon was regarded as among the most dangerous of all fruits) and of prosciutto and figs, as well as the fruit sauces served with meats in some European cuisines: applesauce and pork, or berry sauce and fowl, to cite just two.

For example, we read about oranges in particular in the *Tacuinum sanitatis*, a health manual written in Arabic in the eleventh century (the *Taqwīm al-Sihha*) and translated into Latin in mid-thirteenth-century Palermo; it was widely disseminated in the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Italy, where it became so popular that in modern Italian the common word *taccuino* describes any type of notebook. The *Tacuinum* follows Galen's exposition of Hippocratic theory, based on the four humours. It refers to oranges as "*Cetrona, id est Narancia*" (Citron, that is, orange) and explains that "the pulp of the orange is cold and moist in the third degree; its peel is dry and warm in the second degree. The best variety of orange is that which is perfectly ripe. Its candied peel is good for the stomach. Oranges are difficult to digest, but this difficulty may be assuaged by drinking the best wine" (Scully and Scully 200). The heat of the wine tempers the coldness of the fruit, as does the cooking involved in candying orange peels, thus making oranges healthier for the human body to consume. Likewise, in what is generally regarded as the first scientific work written in the Italian vernacular, *La composizione del mondo* (The composition of the world, 1282), Ristoro d'Arezzo describes the orange – using the same word that Catherine of Siena would use to describe this fruit, *mellarancia* – by focusing on the contrast between the cold nature of the inner fruit and the relatively hot nature of its peel: "we find the cold and sour part chosen and placed inside, as in the orange, and the hot and scented part placed outside, which is the peel" (*troviamo scelta e posta la parte fredda acetosa dentro, come la mellarancia, e la parte calda odorifera posta di fuori, fattone la scorza*; 100).

Owing to its ambiguous health position, hovering between toxicity and healthfulness, delicacy and danger, the early modern status of fruit resembles the ancient Greek notion of the *pharmakon*, an object perceived as both a remedy and a poison, as well as a scapegoat. So also oranges, in the early modern understanding of health, could both provoke an illness and cure it. Early descriptions of citrus fruit, for example, do not say much about its taste but focus instead on its medicinal uses. The earliest known description of oranges by a European is believed to have been penned by a follower of Saint Dominic, the German polymath Albertus Magnus (1206–80). A Dominican, he was educated in Italy and wrote the first scientific treatise of natural history; in 1941 he was declared the patron saint

of natural science and its practitioners. Around 1256, Albertus Magnus wrote of a citron “that is called, by some people, orange” (*Haec autem cedrus vocatur a quibusdam arangus*) and that has “a short and round fruit, with soft flesh and seeds that are a little harder than citron seeds” (*arangus pomum habet breve et rotundum, et caro ejus est mollis, et grana aliquantulum duriora granis cedrinis*; Albertus Magnus 362). Since Albertus Magnus does not write about the flavour of the oranges he is describing, one wonders whether he has ever even tasted one; oranges, like many newly introduced foods (tomatoes being a well-known example), were viewed with suspicion, and perhaps this author did not want to take a chance by eating one.⁶ Albertus Magnus does note, however, that the peel and flesh of this fruit “are very effective against poison” (*multum valet contra venenum*); oranges may be poison and antidote at once. Likewise, the Italian humanist philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1433–89), in his 1481 treatise on how to protect oneself against the plague, writes repeatedly about the effectiveness of drinking the juice of lemons, citrons, or oranges (Ficino 23, 45, 120), and even suggests that “one should carry in one’s hand scented fruit, especially citrons, lemons, and oranges” (*porta in mano per odorare pomi odoriferi massime cedri, limoni, mellarancie*; Ficino 15). Other writers followed suit in recommending citrus fruit as a plague-preventive measure. Among these was the widely influential botanist Pietro Andrea Mattioli (1501–78), for whom, alas, the method did not work, or he did not follow his own advice: Mattioli died of the plague in 1571. A perusal of early modern writings about oranges, then, reveals how handling this fruit, and especially eating it, was regarded as a dangerous proposition, potentially lethal even as it occasionally promised physical healings and, as we will see later in this chapter, perhaps, once in a while, supernatural rewards.

Holy People and the Introduction of Oranges in Europe

Writing about an earlier pope than Paul II, the formidable Innocent III (born Lotario dei Conti di Segni, 1161–1216), who ruled from 1198, historian Margaret Oliphant noted in 1896 that he had “a great love for oranges, and continued to eat them, notwithstanding his illness, though it is difficult to imagine,” she ponders, “what harm oranges could do” (373). Oliphant was writing before the advent, and probably in ignorance, of the modern history of food, which has examined in some depth the ambiguous status of fruit in medieval and early modern diet, with the results that were briefly outlined in the previous section of this chapter, and of

which one must be aware if early modern fruit stories are to make sense. Furthermore, the only oranges cultivated in Italy in medieval times, the time of Innocent III, that is, were those we now call bitter or sour oranges (*Citrus aurantium*), such as the Seville oranges commonly used to make traditional English orange marmalade; these oranges are not so easily found in regular Western shops today. Bitter oranges are quite different from the sweet oranges that are widely available in contemporary supermarkets (*Citrus sinensis*), such as navel, Valencia, or even the less common but increasingly popular blood oranges; all of these sweet oranges are commonly eaten out of hand, peeled or simply sliced, and, at most, juiced. ("The Valencia is the world's most important commercial orange," we read in Clarissa Hyman's book, and this "prolific, thin-skinned fruit ... lives up to its nickname, 'The King of Juice Oranges'"; 37). Unlike bitter oranges, inedible in their raw state, sweet oranges do not need extensive processing in order to be enjoyed.

Like other fruit, and perhaps even more than other, more familiar fruit, given their novelty, the acidity of their pulp, and the bitterness of their rind, oranges were regarded with suspicion in early modern Europe. Remnants of this ambivalence may be recognized in an Italian food proverb: "Oranges are gold in the morning, at noon they are silver, and at night they are lead" (Al mattino le arance sono d'oro, alla mezza sono d'argento e alla sera sono piombo). Citrus fruit, according to this proverb, ought to be eaten in the morning (in the form, for example, of the glass of orange juice that is ubiquitous in American breakfasts), when it is actually good for you and therefore "golden," or, at most, after lunch, when, though not quite as good, it still retains some value – that of silver rather than gold. From a contemporary, scientific perspective one might suppose that the final recommendation in this proverb derives from the fact that citrus is thought to inhibit the enzymes that allow for the digestion of protein. At night, oranges may cause stomach acid and thus interfere with a good night's sleep; they are the equivalent, according to Italian proverbial wisdom, of swallowing a ball of lead. An ambivalent fruit indeed, then, a *pharmakon* that can be both poison and remedy at once, depending on the circumstances of its ingestion.

These early modern medical suspicions against the consumption of fruit in general and oranges in particular were in part assuaged by the role that these new fruits played in the lives of holy people and by the attribution of their arrival to one of Christianity's best-known saints, the Spanish Dominic of Guzmán. Popes and saints loom large in the history of citrus fruit, in Italy as elsewhere, and some telling anecdotes about sweet oranges

in particular – which arrived in Europe later than their bitter counterparts, sometime in the fifteenth century, and took a long time to surpass them as the favoured variety – come to us from the lives of early modern Christian holy people.⁷ The first story concerns a popular fifteenth-century saint from a region that is still an important producer of citrus fruit, Calabria, located at the tip of Italy's boot, a region connected nowadays with some of the more controversial among orange-harvesting practices, as I will discuss in some depth in [chapter 4](#). Saint Francesco, from the town of Paola, was a vegetarian Franciscan monk who, upon his arrival at the French court in 1483, requested the sweet oranges and citrus that were so crucial to his diet. "It is not unlikely that St. Francis of Paola had been used to eating sweet oranges already in his native country of Calabria," Tolkowsky reasonably conjectures (238), after referring to a letter from King Louis XI to François de Genas, in which the monarch wrote, "I beg you to send me lemons and sweet oranges and muscadel pears and parsnips, and it's for the holy man who eats neither meat nor fish" (*je vous prie de m'envoyer des citrons et des oranges douces et des poires muscadelles et des pastenargues, et c'est pour le saint homme qui ne mange ni chair, ni poisson*; Louis XI 124).

Eventually Tolkowsky explains the absence of descriptions of sweet oranges in European texts before 1500, despite his belief in the physical presence of these oranges in Europe, as being due to the fact that oranges in early modern times were prized for their acidity and bitterness. Oranges were used as a condiment, for their juice and zest, not for eating out of hand, and therefore a sweet orange would not have been considered a good fruit for the purposes for which oranges were intended at the time, much less one worth writing about (Tolkowsky 243). In an anonymous Tuscan cookbook of the late fourteenth century we see the juice of bitter oranges being recommended as a condiment for duck, eel, and lamprey (Zambrini 30, 64–5). Mastro Martino, in what is widely regarded as the first modern cookbook, likewise recommends the juice of oranges as a condiment for thrushes (59), eggs (97–8), and pork (168). He also provides a recipe for a verjuice pottage, or soup, featuring eggs, sugar, spices, and orange juice (65). And Platina (Bartolomeo Sacchi), whom I mentioned in the previous section and who borrowed heavily from Mastro Martino, includes oranges in many of the recipes offered in his own cookbook, *De honesta voluptate et valetudine*.

Another sweet-orange anecdote tells of an episode in the life of the prominent mystic writer and Church reformer Teresa de Ahumada y Cepeda (1515–82), best known as Saint Teresa of Avila and hailing from

Spain, a hub of orange production from the very introduction of this fruit to Europe. A fellow Carmelite nun tells the story of Teresa's sickness, which made the saint able to eat only oranges. When a devout local lady sent her some of this fruit, Teresa picked out "a few very fine ones, put them in her pocket and said that she wanted to go downstairs to see a poor man who has been complaining a great deal of his illness. She went, and gave all the oranges to the poor," for it was in the pleasure that the oranges gave the poor that she found her own (St Teresa of Avila, *Complete Works* 357; en viéndolas, echóselas en la manga, y dijo que quería bajar á ver un pobre que se había quejado mucho, y reparte todas las naranjas á los pobres; Ribera 445).⁸ Teresa's appreciation for oranges and for the penance involved in giving away such a delightful delicacy as sweet oranges in particular is quite characteristic of this formidable saint's generous and at the same deeply sensual approach to spirituality and food, and more importantly of the doubly beneficial value of oranges; good for one's body and good for one's soul, oranges provide physical health and spiritual salvation at once.

The healing and pleasing nature of oranges in the life of holy people returns several centuries after Teresa, in spring 1902, when Francesca Cabrini (1850–1917), the Italian-born American saint, visits Rome (she has been in the United States since 1889) and falls sick with fever and exhaustion. Her doctors believe that she is at death's door.

Pope Leo XIII sends her oranges picked in the Vatican gardens. She has not eaten anything for many days, but the Holy Father's oranges must be eaten! She tries one, then sits up in bed: "These are excellent! I now have my strength back." Shortly thereafter, she visits the Pope, who was to die the following year.

(Papa Leone XIII le manda arance colte nei giardini del Vaticano. Non ha mangiato nulla da parecchi giorni, ma bisogna mangiare le arance del Santo Padre! Ne assaggia una, poi si mette a sedere nel letto: "Ottime! Ho ripreso forze." Poco dopo, rende l'ultima visita al Papa che morirà l'anno seguente.) (Marie, Dom Antoine, n.p.).

Holy people loved oranges, according to Christian hagiography and tradition. It is easy to imagine that Pope Innocent's own love of oranges was sparked by the orange tree he received from the renowned Spanish saint and reformer Dominic of Guzmán (1170–1221), founder of the Dominicans, the Order of Preachers. Although historical research, as

we have seen in the introduction, postulates a more complicated introduction of oranges, and citrus fruit generally, to the Italian peninsula, tradition claims specifically and simply that it was this Spaniard, Saint Dominic, who first brought oranges to Italy. Dominic gave an orange tree from his native Spain as a gift to Pope Innocent III, an amateur botanist, in 1216. This gift, like most gifts, was not a simple object, for it put the pope in debt to Dominic; the orange tree was to have a special place in the Basilica of Saint Sabina for centuries to come, reminding visitors of Dominic's generosity in giving and of the pope's debt in accepting.⁹ Planted in the small quadrangular courtyard of the basilica on the Aventine Hill (now the headquarters of the Dominican Order), it is believed to be the oldest orange tree in Rome and still bears fruit, some say miraculously, from the offshoots of the original plant. Tolkwosky, for one, writes: "I have carefully examined the tree and, while it is obvious that the present trunk is not the original one, the root is undoubtedly of great age, and, in view of the extraordinary care with which the monks look after it, I do not consider it altogether an impossibility that the root should be the actual survival of a tree originally planted in St. Dominic's time" (155). The Jesuit botanist Giovanni Battista Ferrari, in *Hesperides*, his 1646 treatise on citrus fruit that is the main subject of my third chapter, also writes about this miracle-bearing tree: "And the fruit itself, as if filled with a heavenly effectiveness, heals human ills needing to be averted, for which benefit this fruit can truly be called golden" (Et poma ipsa, tanquam caelesti efficacitate transfusa, mortalium calamitatibus propulsandis medicata esse, vereque ad beneficium aurea putantur; Ferrari 372).

Today Dominic's orange tree is still located in the cloister of the Basilica of Saint Sabina and may be viewed through a small, round, and glassed-off tunnel window, cut through the walls of the portico of the basilica.¹⁰ This gift of Dominic to the pope marks the beginning of a close bond between Rome and orange trees – as if the debt owed by the pope to Saint Dominic extended to a debt by all of Rome to all oranges – and of the bond between the fruit of this new plant and the spiritual renewal required of all Christians.¹¹ Catherine of Siena's letter to Urban VI, we are told, accompanied a gift of candied oranges, thus confirming the gift quality of oranges from their very introduction to Italy. Gifts, however, are far from simple things, as cultural anthropologists have noted, for they bind us to each other with "the obligation to reciprocate" (Mauss 23) and with the ensuing endless economy of debt – which is exactly what happens in the case of Dominic's tree. The orange tree kept on giving, and Dominican monks distributed fruit and leaves from the tree

at Saint Sabina to the pilgrims who came to visit the basilica. These fruits and leaves were believed to possess miraculous healing properties because of the saintly origin of the tree from which they had been picked.

The distribution of parts of Dominic's tree did not go uncriticized during the period of the Reformation, as one can easily imagine, for the line between free-will offerings in exchange for the gift of oranges, and the possibility that these oranges were in fact being bought and sold – much like the controversial indulgences around this same time period – was a thin one indeed: gifts, as I noted earlier, by their very nature demand reciprocation. Thus, in 1515, the anticlerical German scholar, satirist, and reformer Ulrich von Hutten (1488–1523), an outspoken critic of the Catholic Church, wrote: “This is written at Rome, where grow miraculous apples / And in the hucksters' stalls it is by the pound that they sell them” (in Tolkowsky 189). Gifts do demand reciprocation, and perhaps when pilgrims gave free-will offerings in exchange for the oranges, they were cancelling their debt to the orange givers here on earth in order to be assured of a payback in the beyond. (The pope could have easily given up all of the Saint Sabina oranges in the sixteenth century because by this time he had his own orange grove at his Villa Belvedere on Vatican Hill, and another one in the gardens of his Quirinal palace.)

Through the centuries much has been said and written about Dominic's orange tree, and not only in a critical vein such as von Hutten's. In his mid-sixteenth-century agronomical treatise Agostino Gallo writes:

Some friars of Saint Dominic's assured me that in Rome, in their convent of Saint Sabina, there is an orange tree that has been planted by the blessed hands of Saint Dominic himself and that still abundantly produces the most delicate fruits; this means that it may have been planted there four hundred years ago. And this may be believed, since the orange tree, although its wood is not very hard, when it finds itself in a free and fertile land, grows roots that are deeper than other trees of this genus.

(Alcuni frati di San Domenico mi hanno certificato che in Roma nel convento loro di Santa Sabina, vi è un arancio il quale fu piantato dalle benedette mani di San Domenico, & che tuttavia floridamente produce frutti delicatissimi; di maniera che forse potrebbe esser da quattro cento anni che fu piantato. Et questo è da credere, perché l'arbore dell'arancio non pure è molto duro di legno, ma ancora ritrovandosi in terra libera, & grassa, fa le radici più profonde degli altri di questa specie.) (153)

Known for his gentle approach to the religious conflicts of his time between Catholics and Protestants, the French Saint Francis of Sales (1567–1622), bishop of Geneva, in a letter to his friend and future saint, Jeanne of Chantal, wrote about Dominic's gift tree, informing his beloved protégée that the faithful went to see this orange tree at Saint Sabina and revered it out of love for the holy man who had planted it. In 1831–2 the great orator Jean-Baptiste Henri Lacordaire was in Rome. As he tells of his own residence at Saint Sabina, and of Saint Dominic's traditions in particular, this French Dominican observed that "in a corner of the garden an orange tree planted by himself extends its golden fruit to the pious hand of the citizen or the pilgrim" (Chocarne 266). Although Lacordaire does not say so himself, in order not to appear to be bragging, legend has it that the tree increased its fruit production in marvelous ways when the Dominican Order was also flourishing, and that one such time was during the lifespan of Lacordaire himself, especially during his residency at Rome. The vigour and fertility of the tree reflect the vigour and fertility of the Dominican Order.

Even in tougher times the orange tree endured. After the newly formed secular Italian state had taken over much Church property (Rome was wrested from the pope's political control by Italian royal troops in 1870, ten years after Garibaldi had landed in Sicily, and nine years after the Kingdom of Italy had been proclaimed), the Dominican nun Augusta Theodosia Drane writes in 1891: "The orange-tree of St. Dominic still flourishes at St. Sabina and sends forth new shoots even in the midst of her desecrated cloisters, as though to remind us, when we are disposed to think of the ages of faith as something that have passed away for ever, that even in an unbelieving age God keeps a protecting hand over the ancient faith, the ancient devotions, and the ancient Orders of His Church" (Drane 453).

A few decades later, in the early years of Fascism, changes took place around Dominic's orange tree in Saint Sabina, changes that continued to highlight the sacredness of this botanical first. By 1932, ten years after Mussolini had taken power, the Giardino degli Aranci (Garden of the Oranges) had opened on the Aventine, right next to the apse of Saint Sabina; in the meantime a baroque chapel had been added and dedicated to Saint Catherine of Siena herself, one of the glories of the Dominican Order in charge of this basilica: she was also among the first to be remembered for picking Saint Dominic's oranges. According to an article published in 1932 in Rome's municipal publication *Capitolium*, the

Garden of the Oranges on the Aventine had the objective of bettering the common people (“il popolo”) in terms of both their physical health (“la sua salute fisica”) and their spiritual education (“la sua educazione spirituale”; Marignani 224). The bitter orange tree planted by the entrance to the garden in the early 1930s, as this popular publication notes, “recalls with the abundance of its flashy fruit the memory of that other sour orange tree or bitter orange tree transplanted on this hill by Saint Dominic and remembered by Saint Catherine, a tree that according to tradition still survives in the nearby convent of Saint Sabina” (richiama con la copia delle sue frutta vistose il ricordo di quell’altro melangolo o melarancio trapiantato sul colle da S. Domenico e ricordato da S. Caterina, che la tradizione fa ancora sopravvivere nel vicino convento di S. Sabina; Marignani 228). A few years later, in 1936, the level of Dominic’s tree was lowered during restoration work in the Saint Sabina cloister garden. On that occasion a fourteenth-century coin was discovered among its roots, a find that confirmed the tree’s venerable age and its medieval origins. In 1939 the tree was replanted, grafted from a branch of Dominic’s original tree, and in 1958 the sacred fence, which was still visible around the tree, was rebuilt.¹² The stories that are told about this orange tree and its orange-rich surrounding area – the Garden of the Oranges, with its lush plantings and breathtaking views of the Eternal City, remains a favourite Roman spot for those in the know – confirm the connection between orange trees and holiness, issuing an invitation to accept oranges as a remedy rather than a poison, and as a food that bears a special connection with health and salvation.

Sweet and Bitter Flavours in Catherine’s Orange Letter

“*To Urban VI.* In the name of Jesus Christ crucified and of sweet Mary. Most holy and very sweet Father in sweet Jesus Christ” (*A Urbano VI.* Al nome di Gesù Cristo crocifisso e di Maria dolce. Santissimo e dolcissimo Padre in Cristo dolce Gesù; *Le lettere* 129). Thus begins number 346 of about 380 extant letters by Catherine, the largest collection of letters written by a woman in the Middle Ages, and one of the largest collections of letters in general from that time period, regardless of gender. Several of Catherine’s missives are addressed to Pope Urban VI, and this letter dates from August 1379, about a year after the beginning of his pontificate in April 1378, and less than a year before Catherine’s death in Rome in April 1380. Born Catarina Benincasa in 1347 in Siena, she had been called to the Eternal City by a pope who needed her considerable political

and spiritual skills. In addition to writing to Urban VI, Catherine had corresponded regularly with Urban's predecessor, Pope Gregory XI, as well as family members, friends, followers, and a number of power brokers of her time, including Giovanna, Queen of Naples. Most of Catherine's letters begin with a salutation similar to the one on letter 346, namely, with either Mary or Jesus – or, as in this case, both – being described as “sweet” (*dolce*, in the original Italian). This is not unusual, given that, as religious historian Rachel Fulton explains, “the association between Christ's sacrifice and sweetness was to become more or less ubiquitous in the devotional writing and imagery of the later Middle Ages” (“Taste and See” 177). In these Christian texts the word *sweet*, Fulton rightly insists, denotes physical flavour, rather than some intellectual abstraction of sweetness; the sweet taste of Jesus, physically ingested in the Eucharist, is the sensorial equivalent of the Truth that Christians are to make their own. Indeed, Fulton points out, “taste is the last sensation we have before the Other becomes ourselves” (203). Catherine's invocation of sweetness is literal and not just spiritual.

Human beings are wired to like sweetness, probably because sweetness is a sign of nutritious food such as mother's milk, first and foremost. Sweetness, therefore, persuasively indicates what is good for you, what keeps you alive through its ingestion. God too, then, tastes sweet; indeed, God provides the ultimate sweetness. Catherine's repeated use of the adjective *dolce* in this particular epistolary opening, furthermore, acquires special significance in a text that revolves around the imagery of sweet and bitter taste – both characteristic of medieval oranges – and thus provides a small example of what the scholar of spirituality Bernard McGinn describes as the “appeal to the spiritual senses [that] was a fundamental mode of expression in patristic and medieval mysticism” (“The Language of Inner Experience” 160). That the pope himself, in this opening, should be described as “*dolcissimo*” (very sweet) is an ironic jab or wishful thinking at best on Catherine's part, for Bartolomeo Prignano, pope under the name of Urban VI, was irascible, stubborn, and even, according to some, abnormally violent: “Urban VI knew his canon law well, was admired for his austere spirituality, and promised to usher in necessary reforms, but his difficult personality led him to pursue laudable goals in a belligerent manner” (Bellitto 14). Thus, whereas Urban's predecessor, Gregory XI (1370–8), was a mild and gentle man and, if anything, a bit of a wimp, the harshness of Urban's temperament alienated many of his cardinals, which in turn played an important role in precipitating the Western Schism, an event that profoundly troubled Catherine

and against which she dictated some of the more formidable among her letters. Urban VI was not a sweet man, by any means – nor was he known for his love of fruit such as melons and oranges, as were Paul II after him and Innocent III before him.

The ambivalent nature of oranges as both dangerous to one's health and aristocratic in social terms, and even as a food that is remedy and poison at once, is reflected in the dual nature of bitterness itself and in the close connections between this flavour and that of sweetness – reflections and connections that Catherine carefully exploits in her letter in order to exhort the pope to carry out what she clearly regards as an urgent spiritual conversion on his part. Thus, the taste contrast between sweet and bitter, intrinsic to the enjoyment of citrus fruit (and of early modern citrus fruit especially, since they were more sour and bitter than today's), and the reliance of each of these flavours on the other, lie at the very heart of this letter, which starts with the formulaic address cited above and is immediately followed by an equally formulaic introduction by the writer.

I, Catherine, servant and slave to the servants of Jesus Christ, write to you in his precious blood, with the desire to see all bitterness removed from you ... may you be left only with that sweet pain that fattens and fortifies the soul, because it proceeds from the fire of divine charity: that is, to suffer and experience bitterness only from our own faults.

(Io Catarina, serva e schiava de' servi di Gesù Cristo, scrivo a voi nel prezioso sangue suo; con desiderio di vedere tolta da voi ogni amaritudine ... sola rimanga in voi quella dolce pena che ingrassa e fortifica l'anima, perché procede dal fuoco della divina carità: cioè di dolerci e pigliare amaritudine solo delle colpe nostre.) (*Le lettere* 129)

Catherine's humility in this opening, it bears noting, is only apparent. Catherine calls herself a servant, and indeed a servant to servants, but there is surely a certain audacity in applying to oneself a grammatically feminine version of one of the pope's own titles, the Latin "servus servorum Dei" (servant of God's servants) – a formula first used extensively by Pope Gregory I and cited regularly since the ninth century in the title of documents issued by the pontiff.

Despite initially stating the "desire to see *all* bitterness removed from you" (emphasis mine) in the introduction quoted above, Catherine quickly goes on to distinguish between two types of bitterness, one of which should not in fact be "removed" (tolta) from oneself, because it is no less

spiritually desirable than the experience of divine sweetness. This is the kind of bitterness that is due first of all to our own faults, Catherine later continues, as well as to sins against God and to the loss of the souls of infidels. These spiritual sins cause physical pain, imaged in the realistic and quite bodily sensation of tasting something bitter. Throughout this letter Catherine exploits the intrinsic ambivalence of the word *bitter*. This ambivalence, which still persists in Italian as well as in English, works both literally and metaphorically and relies precisely on the pervasiveness of taste metaphors. These metaphors, in turn, are prevalent because a sense of taste and the ability to differentiate between different flavours are keen human skills.

Certainly metaphorical bitterness carries negative connotations in several languages, including Italian and English: we endure bitter cold and bitter struggles, suffer bitter sorrow, cry bitter tears, and see difficult things through to their bitter end. To experience bitterness is to experience pain. Bitterness, however, precisely because of its reference to suffering, points to a depth that is absent in other metaphorical flavours. Sour, for example, is a superficial and rather meaningless fault, usually gendered as a female attribute and indicating impatience and frustration. Sweetness too, though pleasant, is increasingly associated with a superficial niceness (who wants to be called “honey” or described as “saccharine sweet”?), and this superficial niceness, in addition to being an undesirable character trait, has little to do today with the divine – as it did in Catherine’s time. (It may be worth exploring whether there might be a connection between the loss of profundity in the metaphor of spiritual sweetness that was so popular in the medieval period, and the increased availability of sugar in the modern age.)

Bitterness, like the dual *pharmakon*, conveys two opposite meanings at once. Catherine’s words in letter 346 are meant to goad Urban into shedding the sinful bitterness of self-love and embracing the life-affirming and very different bitterness of divine charity, so that his soul may be fattened rather than wither through the ingestion of a flavour that is health giving instead of toxic. Italian proverbs remind us of the value of bitterness: “Cose amare, tienile care” (Hold dear bitter things); “Erba ch’è amara, stomaco rischiara” (A bitter herb clears the stomach); and, most aptly for this letter that begins with three iterations of the word *dolce*, “Il dolce si conosce per l’amaro” (We know sweetness because of bitterness). Italian cuisine has a soft spot for bitter things, as evidenced by the popularity of bitter vegetables such as artichokes, radicchio, and chicory, to name a few; of bitter digestive liqueurs, whether made from herbs (fittingly called

amari, i.e., “bitter things”) or made from the bitter rind of citrus fruit (the immensely popular limoncello, for instance); and, of course, of espresso, a beverage in which the natural bitterness of coffee beans is enhanced by the Italian method of dark roasting (although, having been introduced to Italy by Venetian traders in the 1600s, coffee was not available to Catherine of Siena or to her Italian contemporaries). Metaphorically, too, bitterness – especially in a person – is generally seen as the result of sorrow and suffering and as adding a certain complexity of character; a bitter person is not necessarily someone with whom we want to spend much time, but to feel “amareggiato” in Italian, as to feel “embittered” in English, is the result of painful experiences, of undeserved grief, and is neither a personality defect such as having a sour temper, nor a superficial personality trait such as being “sweet” (both, incidentally, are more frequently associated with women than with men).¹³

It is to a bitter tree that Catherine turns, in the middle of her letter, with a botanical metaphor through which she compares the pope to an unnamed plant that will eventually be explicitly likened to an orange tree. It is worth remembering that the tree is an image dear to Catherine’s epistolary production as well as to her other writings. In her letter 185 to Pope Gregory XI, for example, both the pontiff and Christ himself are compared to trees that produce delicate and sweet fruit. In her letter to Urban VI, however, the kind of tree that Catherine is talking about is neither delicate nor entirely sweet. “Be for me a tree of love,” writes Catherine, “grafted on the tree of life, Christ sweet Jesus” (*Siatemi uno arbore d’amore, innestato nell’arbore della vita, Cristo dolce Gesù; Le lettere* 130). The image of the tree, for Catherine as for medieval writers generally, metonymically points to the tree of the Cross bearing the crucified body of Christ, the very tree that reversed the effects of the tree of Eden. Adam’s *felix culpa*, the bitterness of which eventually led to human beings’ enjoyment of Christ’s sweetness, was indeed thought by some to consist of the ingestion of a citrus fruit, rather than the more traditional apple – a citrus fruit described in early modern Europe with the eloquent name “Adam’s apple” (I will say more about this fruit in the next chapter). In the words of medieval historian Sara Ritchey, “the tree of crucifixion was represented in medieval arboreal legends of salvation as the instrument that reversed original sin so that, just as the fall of humanity was occasioned by the tree of the Fall, so human redemption was secured by the tree of Crucifixion” (69).

Christ’s is the tree of life, we read in letter 346, the very tree of life on which Pope Urban’s own tree of love must be grafted if it is to thrive

(likewise, citrus trees are most commonly propagated through grafting, rather than from seed). Out of this tree will be born the flower of virtues, which will in turn give birth to a fruit consisting of hunger for the honour of God and the salvation of his flock – as Catherine specifies:

From this tree may be born the flower of conceiving in your love the virtues and the fruit, birthing it in the hunger of God's honour and the health of your little sheep. Which fruit, at the beginning, seems bitter, when one takes it in the mouth of holy desire; but as the soul has chosen to hold on until death for the crucified Christ and for love of virtue, so this fruit becomes sweet.

(Di questo arbore nasca il fiore di concipere nell'affetto vostro le virtù e il frutto, partorendolo nella fame dell'onore di Dio e salute delle vostre pecorelle. Il quale frutto nel suo principio pare che sia amaro, pigliandolo con la bocca del santo desiderio; ma come l'anima ha deliberato in sé di volere sostenere infino alla morte per Cristo crocifisso e per amore della virtù, così diventa dolce.) (*Le lettere* 130)

Through the common metaphor that identifies desire as a form of hunger, Catherine warns her reader that what she is entreating him to ingest is not an immediately delicious fruit, and indeed it is nothing like the sweet and delicate fruit mentioned in Catherine's earlier letter to Pope Urban's predecessor. Initially, in fact, this fruit tastes quite bitter – it hurts to be good, Catherine is implying – and it is only the love of Christ and of virtue that will improve its flavour. In this regard, the fruit in letter 346 is the opposite of the fruit of Genesis; whereas that initially sweet fruit brought the Fall, this initially bitter fruit brings, in time, the sweetness of salvation.

Bitterness, for Catherine, implies both the possibility of toxicity and that of nutrition, the risk of sinfulness and the prospect of spiritual depth. In her letter she requires Urban to shed one type of bitterness, the bitterness of self-love, and acquire another type of bitterness altogether, one brought on by the love of virtue. Catherine's letter is therefore careful to describe the varieties of bitterness and the very different results to which each one leads. On the first page of the letter there is, on the one hand, a bitter pain "which nourishes the soul in the honour of God, and feeds her, on the table of the most holy cross, with the food for the souls; and this pain fortifies the soul" (che nutrica l'anima nell'onore di Dio, e pascela, in su la mensa della santissima Croce, del cibo dell'anime; e

la fortifica). This is the salvific bitterness of Christ's pain as tasted by the pain of bearing his Cross; this kind of bitterness is necessary if we are to be saved, and it is like the initial bitterness of the bitter orange. And then there is also, immediately following, "the weakness of self-love, which provides a bitterness that troubles and dries out the soul, because it has deprived the soul of charity" (la debilezza dell'amore proprio, il quale dà amaritudine che affligge e dissecca l'anima, perché l'ha privata della carità).

Charity, as we have seen, was an attribute that Urban notoriously lacked. Both types of bitterness may coexist in a single person, but not for long, implies Catherine, because "those who have within themselves this sweet bitterness get rid of the bitter part, because they do not seek out themselves for themselves, but rather themselves for God, and the creature for God, and not for their own utility and pleasure" (quegli, che ha in sé questa dolce amaritudine, caccia l'amaro, perché non cerca sé per sé, ma sé per Dio, e la creatura per Dio, e non per propria utilità e diletto; *Le lettere* 129–30). Charity, that is, may taste bitter initially – as the Cross is painful at first, as the orange is bitter in its raw state – but it is salvific rather than toxic and is powerful enough to eventually eliminate the other kind of bitterness, the kind engendered by the "weakness of self-love." (Catherine's spiritual bitterness, by the way, is as multifaceted as its physical referent, since we now know from scientific studies that "the stimulation of bitter tastes is particularly complex and chemically diverse," Korsmeyer 74).

From the beloved yet somewhat generic and unoriginal metaphor of the fruit-bearing tree, alluding perhaps to the tree of Eden and the tree of the Cross, Catherine moves on to a particular tree and its very specific fruit: the orange or, as it was called in medieval Italy, *melarancia*, a word that sounds to an Italian ear like "orange-apple." Oranges were initially named *melarance* likely because apples were the fruit that these new fruits resembled the most, among the well-known fruit, in terms of size and shape – even though, ironically, apples and oranges in English have become proverbially different. Thus, right after the reference to Christ as an initially bitter-fruit-bearing tree, Catherine explains in her letter that oranges, like love of Christ and love of virtues, do not taste sweet right away. Rather, she continues, one must be patient and process the fruit in the most effective way, through a form of conversion that the human soul ought to strive to imitate:

I have seen, on occasion, that the orange, which in itself seems bitter and strong, once you have removed what is inside it, and by soaking it, water

draws out its bitterness; then it may be filled with comforting things, and its surface glazed with gold. And where did the bitterness go, that made it difficult to put the orange into one's mouth? In the water and in the fire.

(Alcuna volta io ho veduto che la melarancia, che in sé pare amara e forte, trattone quello che v'è dentro, e mettendola in mollo, l'acqua ne trae l'amaro; poi si riempie con cose confortative, e di fuore si copre d'oro. E dove n'è ito quello amaro che nel suo principio con fatica se la poneva l'uomo a bocca? Nell'acqua e nel fuoco.) (*Le lettere* 130–1)

Good things come to those who not only wait, Catherine seems to say, but also take the time to process their food, and their soul, in ways that most effectively bring out the most pleasant of flavours and the largest dose of charity. Catherine's skilful rhetorical use of the orange imagery in her letter allows her to harshly criticize the pope and exhort him to change, even as she seemingly speaks of something altogether different, something that is more appropriately the purview of a woman – the handling of food and the processes of cooking, serving, and eating.

Catherine's Recipe for Candying and for Holiness

"This letter was written to the Pontiff, on the occasion of sending him the gift of five candied and gilded oranges, from which this Saint draws her long simile meant to sweeten the bitterness of Urban's spirit" (questa lettera essere essa scritta al Pontefice, in occasione d'inviargli in dono cinque melarance confettate, e dorate, onde è che da esse trae la Santa lunga simiglianza per addolcire l'amaritudine dell'Animo d'Urbano; Burlamacchi 140). Thus, in his 1721 edition of Catherine's works, Italian Jesuit and philologist Federico Burlamacchi describes a pen annotation on the manuscript of Catherine's letters. This annotation also leads Burlamacchi to presume that Catherine's letter 346 was written from Rome "since it would be very unlikely that she would send him all the way from Tuscany such a small gift" (non avendo punto del probabile, che di Toscana gl'indirizzasse regalo sì minuto; 140). Catherine's classic biographer Arrigo Levasti some two centuries after Burlamacchi confirms that Catherine "found the time to candy oranges that she would send to the Pope as a gift" (trova il tempo di confettare arance che invierà in dono al Papa; 377). It is worth remembering here that candied citrus fruits were among the earliest sweets of the European Middle Ages, and a product for which Italy was especially known; professionally

produced confectionery, the purview of the wealthy, began to flourish in the thirteenth century (Richardson 105). Confectionery often focused on candied citrus fruits because their porous yet tough rind made the process simple and effective and the product delicious (candied citrus peels are still very popular today, sometimes dipped in chocolate), and also because what we would recognize today as regular hard candies were for centuries produced by apothecaries as medicinal pills rather than as enjoyable palate pleasers.

For her spiritual instructions to the pope, Catherine turns to an aristocratic preparation – the expensive and uncommon process of candying – of a fruit that was relatively new in fourteenth-century Europe, and therefore still open to a variety of metaphorical uses. And it is from Saint Dominic's gift tree at the Basilica of Saint Sabina that Catherine of Siena is believed to have picked the oranges she candied and then sent as a gift to Urban VI. The gift reinforced her use of citrus metaphors in her letter by providing a physical, edible example of the results of the very directions she describes in words: removing pulp, soaking the fruit in water, cooking over fire, filling with honey, and glazing with gold leaf. The candied oranges that accompanied Catherine's harsh letter of reprimand and exhortation thus sweetened, so to speak, its impact – in addition to strengthening the pope's debt of gratitude towards Catherine herself and reinforcing the requirement that he do as she asks. That Catherine, who can be easily found near if not at the top of the list of the so-called holy anorexics – those Christian holy women who gave up eating for the love of God and eventually perished at least partly because of it – should have prepared a delicacy such as candied oranges is a delicious tid-bit of spiritual history.¹⁴ Catherine of Siena's fasting excesses are well known, as is the fact that her early death at the age of thirty-three was certainly accelerated, if not caused, by her numerous acts of self-starvation. Historian Rudolph Bell first wrote about this in his ground-breaking book *Holy Anorexia*, which begins with Catherine's story and features the iconic picture of her emaciated face on the cover. Another citrus-related, fasting character who is highlighted in Bell's book is Saint Veronica Giuliani (1660–1727), who is remembered for eating nothing but five orange seeds on Fridays in remembrance of Christ's five wounds suffered on the Cross (Bell 75). As signs of nourishment, or lack thereof, the ambivalent oranges return time and again in Christian fruit symbolism.¹⁵

The analogies between physical health and spiritual salvation, and their common etymology in the Latin word *salus*, underlie the comparison that Catherine proposes in her letter to Urban VI between her instructions

for making bitter oranges edible and good to eat, through a recipe for candying, and her recommendations for the pope's process of personal conversion. Indeed, the bitter oranges to which Catherine refers are ideal for preserving and candying, but, however appealing their shape, colour, and scent, they are inedible when raw; they need to be soaked, cooked, and sweetened before being consumed. This takes place most often today in the form of traditional marmalade and occasionally as candied peels (or as Nigella Lawson's chocolate cake, though this cookbook author does not call specifically for bitter oranges). It is cooking that ultimately makes these oranges palatable, cooking that tames their toxic bitterness into a nutritious sweetness. The fact that foods such as bitter oranges still require considerable processing before proving ready to eat provides a contemporary example of how cooking, in traditional beliefs about bodily health, "was a medical act, a technology for transforming the flavors of substances, rendering them more digestible, nutritious and potentially healing to man" (Mandelkern 8). So also Catherine explains that oranges taste bitter at first, like the afore-mentioned love of Christ and of virtue, like the fruit growing on the tree of Christ. In order to taste good, oranges must be emptied out, soaked, cooked, filled, and glazed. The toxic-tasting bitterness, thanks to these processes, is left behind in the soaking water and the cooking fire.

Catherine's directions for preparing bitter oranges into a sweet confection, and the fundamental human need for such processing of both fruit and soul, remind her readers that taste is important not only, and not even primarily, because of the pleasure it affords. Taste, rather, is important because to taste, in the medieval imagination, means to know. Despite the fact that the more obviously chemical among the senses – taste and smell – have been traditionally ranked lower than sight and hearing in terms of their connection with reason (and it is believed that "the chemical sense – taste and smell – are the most primitive of the sensory modalities"; McLaughlin and Margolskee 538), those languages that derive from Latin have preserved the intrinsic etymological association between knowledge and taste: *sapere/sapore*, for example, in Italian (*sapere* means "to know"; *sapore* means "flavour"). Medieval religious writings such as those of Bernard of Clairvaux, as medievalist Mary Carruthers notes, emphasize "the connection of tasting and knowing that inheres in the meanings of the Latin verb *sapio, sapere*," and that "human knowledge is created through natural psychological processes and sensory experiences, because tasting flavors is also a means of knowing, even knowing God" (Carruthers 1000–1).¹⁶

This correlation between taste and knowledge – even knowledge of God, as Carruthers observes – is related to the fact that only through taste, in Western medicine and through the eighteenth century, was it possible to ascertain the nature of any food: food was understood to be toxic or nutritious according to its relative bitterness or sweetness. Even the Swedish scientist Carl Linnaeus (1707–78), regarded by many as the father of modern botany, believed the tastes of plants to indicate accurately their relative healthfulness: “*Tasty* and *sweet-smelling* [plants] are wholesome; *nauseous* and *strong-smelling* ones are poisonous. These notions are written into the sense of all animals” (Linné 305). The youngest of human animals, newborn babies, have indeed been observed to show different facial responses to the four basic tastes: they relax and suck in response to sweetness, thus facilitating the ingestion of sweet, nourishing foods; they purse their lips and suck rapidly when the taste is sour, in order to stimulate the salivary glands and dilute the sourness of otherwise nourishing foods; and they open their mouths and elevate their tongue when tasting bitterness, thus blocking the swallowing of bitter and often toxic substances (Rosenstein and Oster 1564–5).

Physical reactions to the basic flavours seem to be innate in human beings, as is a preference for sweetness (mother’s milk) and a distrust of bitterness (the flavour of many a toxic substance). In the Hippocratic treatise *On Ancient Medicine* (fifth century BCE), on which Western medicine relied for many centuries – through antiquity and well into the early modern era – it was the taste of a food (and not its relative coldness or heat) that informed us of the effect it would have on the human body (much as it did for Linnaeus). “And thus, of articles of food,” Hippocrates explains, “those which are unsuitable and hurtful to man when administered, every one is either bitter, or intensely so, or saltish or acid, or something else intense and strong, and therefore we are disordered by them” (1.170). As a critic puts it, “for thousands of years, physicians have described the faculty of taste as an inborn survival mechanism, helping men and animals choose foods that nourished and avoid those that harmed ... Lacking external knowledge or surrogate nutritional cues, all beings would perish without it” (Mandelkern 8). Indeed, if you think of it, “in nature, poisons are bitter; sour fruit is not ripe; sweet fruit is ripe; and a preference for salt will produce ingestion of many needed materials. Beyond these simple genetically mediated preferences, however, food choice is learned” (Capaldi 9). The physical ability to differentiate between different tastes could save one’s life, and Catherine’s letter implies that differentiating between the two types of

psychological bitterness – the undesirable, soul-withering kind, and the desirable, soul-fattening kind – could likewise, and much more importantly, save one's soul.¹⁷

Not confident that her extended cooking metaphor will be understood by her reader – it is not likely that a pope, and especially a medieval one, has had much experience in the kitchen – Catherine goes on to explicate with some precision just how the bitter taste of virtue is removed by the water of Grace and the fire of Charity in a way similar to that in which the bitterness of an orange is made palatable through boiling – through the cooking process, that is, which fundamentally combines water and fire.

Thus, holiest Father, the soul which conceives the love of virtue, at the beginning feels bitterness, because the soul is still imperfect; but then the remedy of the blood of the crucified Christ intervenes, which blood provides the water of Grace, which draws out all bitterness from one's senses; and I mean troubling bitterness, as I said already.

(Così, santissimo Padre, l'anima che concipe amore alla virtù, nel primo entrare gli pare amaro, perché è anco imperfetta; ma vuolsi ponere il rimedio del sangue di Cristo crocifisso, il quale sangue dà un'acqua di Grazia, che ne trae ogni amaritudine della propria sensualità; amaritudine dico affliggitiva, come detto è.) (*Le lettere* 131)

Catherine is quick to specify here that not all bitterness, only “troubling bitterness,” must be “drawn out from one's senses.” Being a good pope is tough, and it can definitely be bitter as well. So, in her spirit of goading encouragement, Catherine continues:

And because blood is not without fire, since it was shed with the fire of love, one can say (and this is the truth) that fire and water draw out of the soul all bitterness, emptying the soul of what was there already, i.e., the love of self; then the soul is filled with the comfort of a strength endowed with true perseverance, and with a patience soaked with the honey of profound humility, strong in self-knowledge; because during the time of bitterness the soul better knows herself and the goodness of her Creator.

(E perché sangue non è senza fuoco, perocché fu sparto con fuoco d'amore; puossi dire [e così è la verità] che il fuoco e l'acqua ne tragga l'amaro, vuotatosi di quella che prima v'era, cioè dell'amore proprio di sé: poi l'ha riempito

d'uno conforto di fortezza con vera perseveranzia, e con una pazienza intrisa con mele di profonda umiltà, serrate nel cognoscimento di sé; perché nel tempo dell'amaritudine l'anima meglio cognosce sé e la bontà del suo Creatore.) (*Le lettere* 131)¹⁸

The orange, at this point of the letter, no longer stands for virtue as it did at first for Catherine, but rather the orange has become an image of the human soul, hovering between sweetness and bitterness. Catherine's metaphor, then, shifts: much like the orange, through the candying process, needs to be emptied of its bitter pulp and filled with comforting foods, so also the soul must be emptied of its bitter self and filled with the comfort of strength, perseverance, patience, humility, and self-knowledge – all sweet things, that is. The sweetness of Christ, tasting of his Grace and Charity, replaces the bitter flavour of human self-love. The cooking process is necessary if the fruit is to be healthful, since medieval medical theories about food centred on one certainty, according to Italian food historian Massimo Montanari, namely that “whatever tastes good is good for you” (*ciò che è buono fa bene*).¹⁹

Given the amount of space that Catherine devotes in her letter to the two types of bitterness, which type must be avoided, which type should be embraced, and why, and how often she repeats these ideas, her advice to Pope Urban VI stands out, when the whole letter is read in one sitting, as being much more severe than any single quotation from Catherine's mis-sive might suggest. More than recommending, Catherine is really ordering Urban to divest himself of the bad kind of bitterness that has made him known as uncharitable and prone to anger, and to embrace the good kind of bitterness so that he may do the will of God and preserve the unity of the Church even as he prepares to reform it. In Catherine's own words, it is

through bitterness and endurance [that this eternal Truth] wants you to reform the sweet Bride that is both yours and Christ's, a Bride that for so long now has grown all pale ... by those who fed and still feed at her breast, who, because of their defects, have shown her to be pale and ill, because they have sucked her blood away through their own self-love.

(nell'amaritudine e nel sostenere [questa Verità eterna] vuole che riformiate la dolce Sposa sua e vostra, che tanto tempo è stata tutta impallidita ... in coloro che si pascevano e pascono al petto suo, che per li difetti loro

l'hanno mostrata pallida e inferma, succhiatole il sangue d'addosso con l'amore proprio di loro.) (*Le lettere* 130)

The need for reform and conversion on the pope's part could not be stated more clearly. Throughout the letter and in more or less subtle ways Catherine tells Urban what to do and how to be. Bitterness is necessary, the saint tells the pope, in order to reform the Church as the Bride of Christ, and himself as the Church's spouse: even good fruit such as the orange tastes bitter at first. Catherine knows this because God has informed her; sinners are sucking the blood of the Church like infants at their mother's breast, and, like parasitical vampires, they are making her "all pale ... pale and ill." Medieval physiology, it is worth remembering, believed breast milk to consist of processed blood – hence the frequent representation, both visual and verbal, of the crucified, bleeding Jesus as a breast-feeding mother: "According to medieval understanding of physiology, the loving mother, like the pelican who is also a symbol for Christ, feeds her child with her own blood. Thus, the connection of blood and milk in many medieval texts is based on more than merely the parallelism of two important bodily fluids" (Walker Bynum 132). But the sin-ridden children of the Church described by Catherine have done more than breast-feed, which is a natural and indeed a necessary act; they have gone straight from milk to blood, and they have not only sucked it – they have sucked it away.²⁰

In an article that explores the theme of conversion in three of Catherine's letters, including her letter 346 to Urban VI, historian Karen Scott notes that Catherine's preparation of oranges is reminiscent of a recipe in the near-contemporary French text *Le Ménagier de Paris*, dating from around 1392–4 and translated as *The Good Wife's Guide*. In this celebrated book an aging bourgeois husband, probably fictional, addresses his fifteen-year-old bride about subjects such as cooking, sex, and all those other things that a good wife should know how to do well. About candying orange peels we read in a recent English translation of *Le Ménagier de Paris*:

To make candied orange peel, cut the peel of one orange into five pieces and scrape off the pith with a knife. Then soak the peels in nice fresh water for nine days, changing the water every day. After that, bring them just to a boil in fresh water, then spread them on a cloth and let them dry very well. Put them in a pot and cover with honey, and boil over a low fire and skim.

To test whether the honey is cooked, drop one drop of hot honey into a bowl of water. If it spreads, it is not cooked; but if the drop of honey holds together in the water without spreading, it is cooked. Draw out the orange peels one at a time and layer them, sprinkling with ginger powder between each layer, *usque in infinitum*. Let season a month or more before eating. (*The Good Wife's Guide* 336)

As is typical of medieval cookbooks, *Le Ménagier* neither provides quantities nor includes cooking temperatures or cooking times. Today candied orange peels are traditionally made in almost exactly the same way, except with sugar instead of honey (honey was cheaper than sugar before the production of sugar by slave labour in the Caribbean). We must also remember, for both the recipe in *Le Ménagier* and the one told by Catherine, that “because of its familiarity in the ancient world, honey and its associations – bees, beehives, beeswax – are all weighted with symbolic significance in a manner strikingly different from that characteristic of sugar” (Mintz 856). Honey and the sweetness it brought were more intensely meaningful in Catherine’s time than they are for us today, largely because we are far more accustomed and even inured to them.

Although Catherine is speaking about the entire fruit and not, like *Le Ménagier*, of the peels alone, the soaking, boiling, and sweetening processes are the same, involving the removal of bitterness before the addition of sweetness. As Scott rightly notes, “one can see how well-suited a recipe was for Caterina’s didactic purpose: as a short ‘how to’ set of instructions for transforming simple ingredients into more palatable foods, a recipe was an ideal vehicle for conveying messages about conversion” (103). The recipe as a genre is so effective for Catherine’s objectives that, as Scott concludes, “Caterina’s gift of the candied orange is an elaborate representation of what Urban’s soul will be like once the divine Cook is finished with him” (105). Sweetness and bitterness, experienced at once in the candied orange, are not spiritual opposites but lie on a taste continuum in which one does not exclude the other. On the contrary, the unique taste of one heightens the intensity of the other. “Let us enjoy then this sweet bitterness, which is followed by the comfort of much sweetness” (*Dilettiamoci adunque in questa dolce amaritudine, dopo la quale seguita conforto di molta dolcezza; Le lettere* 130), writes Catherine, and she is echoed by the words of a recent book dedicated to the physical taste of bitterness: “we keep bringing this taste into our kitchens despite our natural dislike of it ... Cooking is about balancing tastes, and bitter

often plays a vital role in a dish's harmony ... Without a touch of bitterness, your cooking will be lacking a dimension" (McLagan 5).

Bitter and sweet, then, may well appear blended together in the same food, as they certainly do in orange marmalade, and in those ambivalent "bittersweet" feelings with whom most of us are familiar – even though today's European cuisine, according to Montanari, "has a predominantly analytical character [because] it tends to differentiate tastes: sweet, salty, bitter, sour, spicy ... reserving for each of these an autonomous space, either in a specific food or in the sequence of the meal" (*Food Is Culture* 62). This is because of a revolution in the history of gastronomy that took place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Before then, and going as far back as ancient Rome, cuisine was based on the balance of tastes: "The perfect food was considered that in which all the tastes (therefore all the virtues) would be simultaneously present" (*Food Is Culture* 63). Bittersweet was one such combination, and its familiarity gave Catherine's letter a sensual and rhetorical energy that is perhaps no longer as evident to us as it would have been to her reader.

Since food was regarded as having medicinal effects at the time of Catherine's writing, the divine Cook was also the divine Doctor. According to Galenic pharmacology, whose theories governed Western medicine for centuries and certainly throughout the medieval period, "contraries cure contraries" (Teigen 64). As a consequence, when they are healthy, human beings are believed to be warm and moist – as proclaimed by the theory of humours I presented earlier. The healthiest foods, therefore, are those that are also, like human beings themselves, warm and moist. This meant that good cooking implied a fair amount of tempering, namely of making ingredients healthful for human consumption by processing them in such a way that they approach a warm and moist state. In the words of early modern food scholar Terence Scully, "late-medieval cookery was a learned science as well as an art ... The cook had to please his patron, but above all he had to ensure that he did absolutely nothing to impair his patron's good health. This meant both knowing the qualities of all the foodstuffs he was apt to be working with, and knowing how to 'amend the evil' that any of them might present" (18). Thus, sweetness – which is moist and warm, like the combination of Christ's water of Grace and his fire of Charity – is the most effective remedy against bitterness; much as the physical elements of water and fire remove the bitterness from an orange, so also the supernatural water of Grace and fire of Charity sweeten a soul suffering from the pains of bitterness. Souls, in

this comparison, are much like oranges. After this tempering procedure, purity can enclose and thus preserve the soul's good health – just like the process of gilding preserves the sweetened orange, Catherine maintains.

After this fruit is filled and closed again, one can see the gold on its exterior, which holds tight what is inside it. This is the gold of purity, shining with fiery charity, which comes out and shows itself in being useful to one's neighbour with true patience, constantly bringing a friendly meekness; tasting only that sweet bitterness that we must have, the bitterness of feeling pain when we offend God and harm other souls.

(Pieno e richiuso questo frutto, apparisce l'oro di fuori, che tiene fasciato ciò che v'è dentro. Questo è l'oro della purità, col lustro dell'affocata carità, il quale esce di fuori, manifestandosi in utilità del prossimo suo con vera pazienza, portando costantemente con mansuetudine cordiale; gustando solo quella dolce amaritudine che doviamo avere, di dolerci dell'offesa di Dio e danno dell'anime.) (*Le lettere* 131)

The distinction between good and bad bitterness is reiterated once again, as a healing nutritional process that is followed by a lesson in the preservation of both food and the soul. Gilding, for Catherine, is a way of containing, of wrapping, of enclosing – of both hiding and showing, actually, because just as the gilding of the orange “holds tight what is inside it,” thus shielding it from the gaze of others, so also such a brightly gilded exterior attracts the eye and points to the preciousness of what is inside. These contents are no longer flavoured with the bitterness of self-love, but neither are they wholly sweet. As Carruthers has shown, “the most interestingly medieval aspect of ‘sweetness’ ... is that it is not just one thing, but has a contrarian nature that includes within itself its opposites: bitter, salt, and sour.” Indeed, as this historian continues, “of all the items in the mixed lexical bag of Latin bequeathed to medieval Europe, ‘sweetness’ – *dulcedo, suavis* – is among the most mixed and trickiest of concepts” (1000–1). The sweetness of the orange is itself tempered with a touch of good bitterness, which, as the proverb reminds us, heightens its flavour: “Il dolce si conosce per l'amaro” (We know sweetness because of bitterness).

The taste metaphors of sweet and bitter that prevail in Catherine's letter, defying the simplistic dualism of an either/or approach to the spiritual experience, and seamlessly joining faith and flavour, are still very much alive today – both in daily speech (we regularly speak of bitter pills,

bitter ends, and bitter people and, with more pleasure, of sweethearts, sweet deals, and sweet words) and in spiritual writings of our times. For example, as American theologian Don Saliers puts it in a 2010 article, “spirituality cannot become fully mature until the fullness of Christ’s embracing sweetness of grace and Christ’s bitter suffering are seen as one” (301). Saliers’s words, though issuing from the pen of a contemporary Protestant and male theologian and not that of a medieval Catholic holy woman, echo Catherine’s message, resonating as they do with the proverbial knowledge that “we know sweetness because of bitterness.” So also the physical and spiritual flavours that are evoked in Catherine’s letter 346 to Urban VI oscillate between, and in so doing join together, sweetness and bitterness, often lingering on that in-between, bittersweet taste that reminds us of the connection between two seemingly opposite flavours, two experiences that only superficially contradict one another; a sip of sweetened espresso, a spoonful of orange marmalade, should be enough to convince the palate that bitter and sweet go together quite well and perhaps cannot be tasted, much less thought of, without one another. Once again, “il dolce si conosce per l’amaro” (we know sweetness because of bitterness), but also, we might say, reversing the traditional saying, “L’amaro si conosce per il dolce” (We know bitterness because of sweetness).

Likewise, the referent for Catherine’s metaphor of the orange – a fruit initially employed by Catherine to describe the changing taste of virtue through the similar processes of cooking and conversion – keeps shifting, even as it reconciles different tastes. Sometimes the pope is an orange that needs sweetening in order to become palatable; sometimes the pope is the tree producing an orange that is already sweet, as if it mysteriously needed no cooking, no tempering – unusual, to say the least, for medieval oranges. The pope’s necessary transformation into a tree is reminiscent of an Ovidian, human-into-plant metamorphosis – like Daphne’s into a laurel shrub, or Myrrha’s into a myrrh tree (a metamorphosis to which I return at the start of [chapter 3](#)). Catherine alludes to this necessary transformation when she concludes her letter:

Now so sweetly, holiest Father, we will produce fruit without that bad bitterness; and in this way the bitterness that we have today in our hearts and in our minds will go away ... I hope in the goodness of our sweet Creator ... Be comforted, sweetest Father ... Jesus is sweet, Jesus is love.

(Or così dolcemente, santissimo Padre, produderemo frutto senza la perversa amaritudine; e da questo averemo che si leverà via l’amaritudine che

oggi aviamo nelli cuori nostri e nelle menti ... Spero nella bontà del dolce Creatore nostro ... Confortatevi, dolcissimo Padre ... Gesù dolce, Gesù amore.) (*Le lettere* 131)

The letter that had begun with a triple invocation of sweetness also ends with this, the most beloved of flavours, the flavour that is first and foremost God's own, but one that can only be fully savoured and known, Catherine reminds us, by a palate willing to share it with the bitterness that must accompany it. It is thanks to a careful attention – on the part of both Catherine and her addressee, be that Pope Urban VI or her twenty-first-century readers – to the flavours of oranges in their numerous bitter and sweet variations, then, that the practical ways of achieving personal transformation might become clear and feasible.

CHAPTER 2



The Fruit of Love: Citrus Symbolism in Pontano and Basile

Oranges as Symbols of Love in Renaissance Culture

At a window, with smart black jackets over bright white shirts, stand two handsome young men in their twenties, with long and curly chestnut hair, a glowing pale complexion, and full and sensuous lips. One, an ephebic and fine-featured youth, is leaning wearily against the windowsill. His gaze is lost in contemplation, and his right hand, its little finger curled over his eyelid, supports his seemingly heavy head, while his left hand holds a small, bright, freshly picked citrus fruit, with leaves still on its stem. The play of light carefully highlights certain features of the young man in the foreground: the corner of his mouth; the ringlets of his shiny hair; his slender, long-fingered hands; and the bitter orange he holds towards the viewer, with its exquisitely painted, golden-hued leaves remaining in the shade and highlighting, through their darkness, the brightness of the orange rind. The diagonal play of the light connects the man's expressive face with the orange he holds, the obvious signs of his suffering and its botanical symbol.¹ The other young man stands behind the first one, almost smirking, it seems. Hatless, unlike his mate, this youth has features that are coarser than those of his companion, rounder and larger, and his expression is somewhat aggressive. Might the two represent the contemplative life and the sensual life?

Painted at the opening of the sixteenth century by that mysterious Venetian artist of the Italian High Renaissance, Giorgione (Giorgio Barbarelli da Castelfranco, 1477?–1510), the canvas known as *Double Portrait* is one of the highlights on exhibit at the museum housed in Palazzo Venezia, at the very heart of Rome and in the same building that once accommodated Mussolini's office. The fruit in the front man's left hand would have been easily recognizable to an educated Renaissance audience as a *melangolo* (bitter orange) – also the word with which the fruit in Giorgione's *Double Portrait* is described in the 1633 inventory of the collection to which the painting belonged, and a word with a similar symbolic value to the apple as Venus's own fruit (Ballarin 499). With the bitter orange, or the *melangolo*, in his hand the young man in the foreground would have been understood to be presenting to the viewer the subject of his thoughts: love. The origin of the botanical term *melangolo* is not altogether clear, though the first part of this word clearly refers to the Italian name for an apple, *mela*, just as Catherine of Siena's oranges were known as *melarance* (apple-oranges), due to the similarity in size and shape of these new citrus fruits to the better-known apples. The meaning of the second part of the word *melangolo* is more difficult to ascertain and has been interpreted as either deriving from *ánguron*, a Greek word for "cucumber," or from *chloros*, another Greek word, this one meaning "green." Like the iconography of fruit in general – all fresh fruit is by its very nature subject to spoilage – Giorgione's orange in this *Double Portrait* represents the precariousness of earthly existence: no matter how ripe and beautiful that bright and bitter orange may be right now, every orange, like every other fruit, is bound to rot.

This awareness of the ephemeral nature of beauty, and indeed of life itself, is likely also the meaning of the *melangolo* being peeled in the first painting known to be by Caravaggio's hand, the representation of an adolescent boy deeply absorbed in his task, holding a small piece of fruit and wielding an equally diminutive sharp and pointy knife. The painting is generically titled, in English, *Boy Peeling Fruit* (1592–3) but is sometimes known, in Italian, as *Ragazzo che sbuccia un melangolo* (Boy peeling a bitter orange). Unfortunately this lovely work, which Caravaggio painted after moving to the Eternal City from Milan in mid-1592, is housed in a private collection in Rome and cannot be enjoyed other than in reproductions. Its popular success, however, may be seen in the numerous copies it has inspired over the years. There has been much arguing, among art historians, about the identity of the fruit handled by the dark-haired, well-dressed adolescent – an upper-class boy quite different from

Caravaggio's favoured ragamuffins. What is being peeled with hands and knife could be a pear, a nectarine, or a plum; other such fruits are found on the table where the youth is busy at his task. But the skin of this small fruit looks thick, so it could be a bergamot (*Citrus bergamia*), a small, green citrus fruit mostly grown in Calabria and used today primarily to give Earl Grey tea its distinctive flavour and scent;² or else in the boy's hand is a bitter orange, the very *melangolo* gracing one of the picture's Italian titles. Neither bergamots nor bitter oranges, surely, are peeled for their unappetizing pulp, and in front of the boy, after all, sits far more appetizing fare: apricots, plums, peaches, cherries. (We must remember, however, that around Caravaggio's time, citrus fruit, and its peel especially, were used for many purposes other than eating; therefore, the fact that bergamots are not edible on their own – though one can still today buy liqueur, marmalade, and a variety of candied confections made out of this Calabrian citrus – should not automatically mean that people did not peel them.)³ The meaning of the boy's fruit choice, therefore, is likely to be allegorical rather than literal; he may be resisting the seductive temptations of sweet fruit in favour of the challenges of a harder life, symbolized by the sour bitterness of citrus and by the labour-intensive preparation it involves. Or perhaps the fruit alludes to the harsh reality that awaits this boy, however privileged the upbringing that is signalled by his appearance: bitterness touches us all, rich and poor, young and old, beautiful and ugly. Stretching the allegorical interpretation a bit further, another art historian advanced that the boy represents Jesus who, by "cleaning" the orange, saves humanity from damnation (*mondare*, the verb in the title of the painting, means to clean more generally and not just to peel, and in fact even means, in religious and spiritual terms, to purify.) Yet another specific and related interpretation is that the orange represents the Fall, or original sin; the peeled orange, in this perspective, is a purified orange, a redeemed orange, and the boy is an adolescent Christ bringing about humankind's salvation through a symbolic peeling away of sin. Caravaggio's is a melancholy boy, a melancholy Christ – underlining the identity of the fruit in the picture as a *melangolo*, a fruit associated with melancholy in Renaissance art and literature (for these different interpretations of Caravaggio's painting, see both Marini and Janick). Finally, the boy may be represented as getting ready to tackle the challenges of romantic love through his handling of the fruit that best represents it.

The bitterness of the orange, its connection to Venus, and the similarity of one of its Italian names, *melangolo*, to the condition brought on

by love and known as melancholia made this fruit an important symbol of love in early modern European culture, both visually and literarily, to such an extent that several works of visual art and literature cannot be understood without an awareness of this connection. The word *melangolo*, whatever its etymology – the historical development of words is notoriously marked by instability and the unknowable – is reminiscent to the Italian ear especially of the name for that condition often indicated as the pre-modern forerunner of clinical depression: melancholia. This linguistic resemblance, however unfounded in philological terms, has reinforced, along with other elements such as the fruit's bitterness, a prevalent metaphorical connection between the two words in early modern Italy. Brought on by an excess of black bile, according to the theory of the four humours described in my first chapter, melancholia was a depressive disease. Thus, Hippocrates describes the "melancholic turn of mind" as characterized by "aversion to food, despondency, and insomnia; irritability, restlessness" (341; vol. 1).⁴ The name of this citrus fruit, *melangolo*, and its physical bitterness, combined with the metaphorical bitterness associated with melancholia, made this fruit an effective symbol for the ailment and for the romantic love often associated with it. The languid young man at the front of Giorgione's window is holding a bitter orange in his hand, a *melangolo*, its bitterness reflecting the temperament of melancholics; an excess of black bile, and therefore a certain melancholia, was believed to be especially common among intellectuals and academics. It is a temperament that is clearly alluded to in the young man's expression of intelligence and being lost in thought – a temperament that is confirmed at a symbolic level by the bitter orange he is holding.

Cardinal Pietro Bembo, poet and humanist, and a scholar who was instrumental in the standardization of the Italian language during the Renaissance, states the bond between love and bitterness in his dialogue *Gli Asolani* (The people of Asolo), written in 1497–1504 and published in Venice by Aldus Manutius in 1505. In this influential Renaissance treatise on the nature of love, bitterness and love are joined together through the words of Perottino, a character who represents the unfortunate lover: "Therefore one cannot love without bitterness: nor does one ever experience or suffer any bitterness for anything other than for love" (Perciò che amare senza amaro non si può: né per altro rispetto si sente giamai e si pate alcuno amaro, che per amore; Bembo 13). Bembo's text revels in word play throughout: *donna* (woman) is closely related to *danno* (damage); and the noun *giovane* (youth) is presented as akin to the verb

giovano (to be good for you). The experience of bitterness in romantic love is inevitable because *amore* (love) finds its etymology in *amaro* (bitter). As a critic has rightly noted, “the combination of these emotions [love, lovesickness, and melancholia] represents a powerful theme for Western literature, if not always Western experience” (Toohey, “Love, Lovesickness, and Melancholia” 266). A century later, Giovanni Battista Ferrari, in his 1646 treatise *Hesperides*, claimed citrus as the fruit of love with words that echo Bembo’s own:

To some people, then, citrus is a well-known fruit of Love: because it is both golden in appearance and delightful to the taste, and pleases not without a mixture of bitterness. Therefore, love should be called a bitter thing: because whoever loves, dies. But since love is a voluntary death, it is a sweet and bitter thing.

(Denique citreum nonnemini est amoris fructus & nota: quod uterque aurea specie, iucundoque gustu, non sine amaritudinis mistura blanditur. Ut propterea res amara dicatur amor: quia moritur, quisquis amat. Cum autem sit amor voluntaria mors, dulcis & amara res.) (Ferrari 41)

The connection between citrus fruit and lovesickness was not considered new in early modern Italy. As a metaphorical bond it was regarded as first of all pagan and related to Venus, the Greek Aphrodite, the goddess of love. The golden fruit, the orange, was also the fruit of love, and it tasted as bittersweet as the feeling it symbolized; it was the fruit of Venus herself. In Greek mythology it was Venus who gave golden apples to a young man named Hippomenes (also known as Melanion, a name possibly derived from the Greek word for apple or fruit, *melon*) so that he might be finally able to conquer the virginal and exceptionally athletic huntress Atalanta, who had refused marriage because an oracle had warned her that marriage would ruin her. Atalanta had been able to stall marriage by stating that she would only accept a man who could outrun her in a foot race – and part of the deal was that she would kill whoever challenged her to a foot race and lost to her. The story was popular in Renaissance culture, and it appears for example, in one of Pierre Ronsard’s *Sonnets pour Hélène* (1578). In this sonnet dedicated to Catherine de’ Medici’s beautiful young protégée, Hélène de Surgères, the French “prince of poets” identifies the lyrical *I* with an alter ego of Hippomenes himself, and his beloved with the quick-footed, yet slow-to-love Atalanta, when he explicitly writes about oranges and lemons and the feelings of love they symbolize:

Hundreds and hundreds of times a day I kiss again the orange
 And the pale lemon stolen from your hand,
 A sweet gift of love, that I keep in my chest
 To make them feel how burning-hot I feel ...
 Oranges and lemons are symbols of Love;
 They are mute signs with which some day I may
 Stop you, as Hippomenes did Atalanta.

(Cent et cent fois le jour l'Orange je rebaise
 Et le palle Citron dérobé de ta main,
 Doux present amoureux, que je loge en mon sein,
 Pour leur faire sentir combien je sens de braise ...
 Oranges et citrons sont symboles d'Amour:
 Ce sont signes muets, que je puis quelque jour
 T'arrester, comme fit Hippomene Atalante.) (Ronsard 277)⁵

Hippomenes wins the race against Atalanta, not because he could run faster than she but because he gets help from Venus; as the goddess of love, Venus was unhappy with Atalanta's refusal to take a mate and was more than willing to help Hippomenes bring her virginity and apparent heartlessness to an end. During the race Hippomenes tosses to the ground the golden apples he has received from Venus for this very purpose, and Atalanta, unable to resist stopping to pick up these shiny fruits, loses the competition. Although ancient sources differ as to where these apples actually came from – Venus's own sacred apple tree in Cyprus or the Garden of the Hesperides – clearly the apples for which Atalanta cannot resist stopping are golden, and they are Venus's own; they stand for love, irresistibly attractive despite its intrinsic bitterness. (In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, it bears noting, the story of Atalanta and Hippomenes comes as a digression told within the episode dedicated to the beautiful youth Adonis and his transformation into an anemone by the hands of Venus as she mourns his premature death. I will say more on Adonis later in this chapter because his story becomes intimately tied to the story of citrus fruit in early modern Italy.) Ancient mythology, and love mythology in particular, was at the very centre of Ronsard's poetic imagination, and by the time he was writing, the High Renaissance, Atalanta's golden apples too, regardless of where they were harvested, were understood as citrus fruit and as symbols of love.⁶

Venus and oranges appear together again in the 1621 edition of Andrea Alciati's *Emblematum liber*, the fullest version of this most important

collection of emblems in early modern Europe (several editions of this work were published starting in 1531). Venus, in one of Alciati's emblems, stands next to an orange tree, and, as was typical of Renaissance emblems, a Latin epigram or motto accompanies the visual image. In this epigram Alciati specifies that Venus's fruit is the fruit she received from Paris as a result of his famous judgment, when he had to give the golden apple to one of three goddesses: Hera, who had promised him political power by making him king of Europe and Asia; Athena, who had promised him wisdom and skill in war; and Venus, who had promised him love in the form of the most beautiful woman in the world.⁷ Paris's golden apple, now Venus's own, was indubitably, for Alciati, an orange; since the experience of love is bitter and sweet, an orange is the fruit best suited to symbolize it. The apple of discord featured in the judgment of Paris, then, in the Renaissance is associated with Venus and identified as an orange. The Latin epigram accompanying Alciati's image of the orange translates as "These golden apples belong to Venus: their sweet bitterness tells us that. Even so is love bittersweet for the Greek" (Aurea sunt Veneris poma haec: iucundus amaror/Indicat, est Graecis sic *glukupikros* amore; Alciati 870). Given the close Renaissance association between Venus and oranges, a critic has advanced that the painting with which I opened this chapter, Giorgione's *Double Portrait*, may refer in fact to the judgment of Paris because it invokes, through the bitter orange the young man is holding, the humanistic topos of the *exhortatio ad iuvenem* (do the right thing, young man); like Paris, the youth in Giorgione's painting holds a golden apple and must choose between the pursuit of power, wisdom, or pleasure, and what matters in the end is not so much the choice that he has to make but the very fact that he has been given this choice (Ballarin 537). (Likewise, in the 1505 portrait known as the *Boy with Red Hat* and usually attributed to Raphael, we see a young Francesco Maria della Rovere, heir to the duchy of Urbino: pictured as proud, austere, and richly, colourfully clad, he holds in his small hands a golden apple, alluding to the "judgment of Paris" that was effected by his uncle Guidobaldo, then Duke of Urbino, who had chosen Francesco as his heir and thus given him a symbolic "orange.")

The love and sexuality embedded in Venus's bittersweet golden apple, the orange – a sexuality always fraught with danger and marked by the possibility of sickness – was not limited to the pagan world. Indeed, that infamous first fruit of the Judeo-Christian tradition, the mysterious and forbidden produce of Eden's best-known tree, has also traditionally been interpreted as being infused with sexual meanings. It was a fruit, after

all, that was offered by a naked woman to a naked man, an irresistible fruit that, in its mixture of good and evil, caused the Fall of the human race. Although it is commonly remembered as an apple, the Latin word for the fruit offered by Eve to Adam, *pomum*, is as vague as its Hebrew original and refers generically to a small and round fruit.⁸ That the Latin word for apple, *malum*, resembles the word for evil, *malus*, contributed in religious rather than botanical ways to the identification of the fruit in question. Adam and Eve partook of an apple, an evil fruit, and one that in the Renaissance, furthermore, was sometimes identified as a kind of citrus, an “Adam’s apple” – a term that we also use today to describe the cartilage of the larynx that forms a projection on the throat, particularly prominent on the throat of men and supposedly caused by a piece of the forbidden fruit that stuck in Adam’s throat as he tried to swallow it.⁹ As fruit, Adam’s apple, or, in its Latin name, *pomum Adami*, is first described in sixteenth-century herbals and was sometimes abbreviated in Italian to the first man’s name and simply referred to in the plural as *gli Adami* (the Adams), as in Agostino Gallo’s sixteenth-century agronomic treatise (144–6, 152). Adam’s apples had thick and rough skin with a pale-yellow colouring, looked like a small orange, and tasted, we are told, as sharp as a lemon – though Gallo claims that “gli Adami” are not good to either eat or candy (152). “What more appropriate fruit could there be for the Fall?” rhetorically asks art historian James Snyder: “It is at one and the same time an apple, a citrus, and an exotic fruit of the Garden of Paradise. It was the very apple of Adam” (515).

The citrus known as *pomum Adami* is the fruit that we see Eve holding in her hand in Jan van Eyck’s celebrated *Ghent Altarpiece* from 1432.¹⁰ Too small, too round, too bumpy, and too yellow to be the representation of any kind of apple, and with citrus-like indentations on the blossom end, this small, orange-like fruit has been identified by art historians as, precisely, Adam’s apple. This fruit does not grow in Van Eyck’s northern Europe, but the artist would have known it from his diplomatic missions to Spain and Portugal, citrus-rich lands; the fruit was so identified for a time as the object of Eden’s temptation that, in early modern Europe, “citrus trees became an indispensable feature in practically every representation of the Garden of Eden” (Tolkowsky 177). Although today we would rarely call an orange a clementine (it is clear to all that their size, shape, and even scent are different) or call a lemon a lime (one is yellow, the other usually green; one oblong and the other much rounder – as well as smaller, in most cases, and with a different taste altogether), in early modern Europe the citrus fruits, which were new and available in

more diverse varieties than they are today, were often mistaken for one another. In the preface to his *Hesperides*, Tolkowsky notes that one of the greatest difficulties in completing his monograph was “the absence, during Antiquity and the Middle Ages, of any uniform terminology to designate the different species and varieties of citrus fruits, a circumstance which more than any other has been responsible for the numerous errors of past writers” (ix). This issue has not been easy to resolve; as late as 2004, British citrus botanist David Mabberley stated that, even at the time of his writing, the literature about citrus fruit “is in chaos. Much of this is due to the fact that the nomenclature used is not consistent because – quite simply – the basic taxonomic work has just not been done” (“Citrus (Rutaceae)” 485). As food writer Clarissa Hyman puts it in her *Oranges: A Global History*, citrus “is the most confusing of fruits. Partly this is to do with its misty history, partly to do with language and taxonomy, and partly to do with the wide and intricate range of species and varieties, spontaneous mutations, cultivated hybrids and crosses that typify the clan” (33). Thus, the confusion among the different varieties of citrus fruit and the Renaissance associations of citrus fruit with the golden apples of Greek myth, and therefore with the goddess of love herself, made it easy, for example, to interchange apples with Adam’s apples, the citrus botanical family of *Rutaceae* with that of the *Rosaceae* to which apples belong.¹¹

The association of citrus fruit with love and sex was reinforced by a marvelled emphasis on the ability of this genus to carry both flowers and fruits at the same time. This feature came to represent their productivity, and, according to a widespread interpretation, it even symbolized the presence of purity and fertility at once. For this reason, in early modern Europe citrus became an important symbol of Mary of Nazareth, virgin and mother both, as well as immaculately conceived: “the Virgin Mary excelled all women in bearing at the same time the white flower of her virginity and the fruit of her chastity” (Levi D’Ancona 274). This horticulturally based connection between Mary and citrus was reinforced by the association of citrus fruit with the botanical geography of the Holy Land. Thus, the presence of citrus fruit in paintings set during the life of Jesus was thought to give added realism to the scene. In Duccio’s celebrated *Maestà*, for example, completed around 1311, we see orange trees in full fruit lining the streets of Jerusalem, and orange trees even replace olive trees in the Garden of Gethsemane. The connection between citrus fruit and Mary of Nazareth was even more powerfully strengthened by the confusion that was mentioned earlier between the citron tree and

the cedar of Lebanon, a stately plant to which the Bride of the Song of Songs – interpreted by Christian theologians as a prefiguration of Mary herself – is compared. In the *Litanies of the Virgin*, for example, Mary is traditionally surrounded by images drawn from the Song of Songs – including the allegorical cedar of Lebanon, used to refer to and directly address Mary herself: “O Cedar of Mount Lebanon” (Moran 224). And although there is no botanical connection between the two plants, in the Italian language the cedar and the citron still share the same name, *cedro*.

Renaissance paintings of Mary surrounded by citrus trees abound, and among these we find the *Madonna of the Orange Tree* (mid-1490s), by the Venetian painter Giovanni Battista Cima da Conegliano. Here the central orange tree functions as an axis of symmetry for the painting as a whole. Furthermore, the colour of its fruit visually links the orange tree to the Madonna, the lining of whose mantle sports a yellow-orange hue (it has been noted that this is “one of the earliest examples of orpiment shaded with realgar,” producing a true orange colour; Hills 146). But the most exuberant example of the iconography connecting Mary of Nazareth with citrus is Andrea Mantegna’s magnificent *Madonna of Victory* of 1496. Looted during the Napoleonic invasions of Italy, never having been returned to Italy, and still hanging at the Louvre, Mantegna’s tempera on canvas features a royal Mary holding the infant Jesus, surrounded by saints and sitting within a colourful pergola that is teeming with a large number of diverse citrus fruit. The viewer can clearly recognize bright, reddish oranges and elongated yellow lemons, as well as much plumper, greenish citrons and other, diminutive citrus fruits, possibly Adam’s apples as well as clementines.¹²

Much like citrus fruit, citrus blossoms convey sexual and reproductive symbolism; their heady scent makes them an important ingredient in the production of French perfumes. Thus, because they symbolize simultaneously purity and fertility, as well, and refer to the Virgin Mary, white orange blossoms have been widely used in wedding rituals in Italy and beyond since the early modern period, and still remain a symbol of the marriage ceremony. For instance, “in 1840 Queen Victoria wore a wreath of fragrant orange-flower blossoms over her lace wedding veil instead of a diamond tiara: white flowers for virginity, orange for fecundity was the connotation” (Hyman 73). So also in “nineteenth- and twentieth-century France, a bride would carry a bouquet of orange blossoms, later preserved under a glass globe in her nuptial bedroom. The symbol of her prior virginity, it stood there as a harbinger of her wished-for fertility” (Laszlo 131). Thus, in contemporary Italy, *fiori d’arancio* (orange

flowers) is an expression used as a metonymy of any wedding (generally, the botanical metaphor of *defloration* and *deflowering* equates the literal breaking of a woman's hymen in sexual intercourse with the act of plucking flowers – an odd comparison if there ever was one).¹³ The whiteness of the orange blossoms doubles the whiteness of the bridal veil and the integrity of the virginal hymen that the white veil stands for; whereas the fertility represented by the plump fruit points to the round shape of the pregnant belly that is meant to follow the wedding night. In his *Martha and Mary Magdalen*, also known as *The Conversion of Mary Magdalen* (ca. 1598), Caravaggio represents the repentant sinner being swayed by the argumentation of her sister Martha; Mary's sexuality, or perhaps her impending faithfulness, is symbolized by the orange blossom she is twirling between her fingers – also an image, probably, of her imminent marriage to Jesus Christ. The complicated history of citrus fruit, intensified by its botanical complexities, and the many connections of this plant genus with love and sex allow for a better understanding of the iconography of this fruit in the Renaissance.

Pontano's *De hortis Hesperidum* and the Praise of Campania

Towards the end of the Renaissance pastoral romance titled *Arcadia*, the shepherd protagonist is horrified when he explains the content of his prophetic dream: "Finally, I saw a very beautiful orange tree that I had tended with much care; it seemed to me that it had been cut down from the roots, its fronds, flowers, and fruits scattered on the ground" (Ultimamente un albero bellissimo di arancio, e da me molto coltivato, mi pareva trovare tronco dalle radici, con le frondi, e i fiori, e i frutti sparsi per terra; Sannazaro 184). The Fates had felled it "with their violent axe" (con le violente scure), thus deeply hurting the shepherd, named Sincero, and leading him to turn "to the beloved tree trunk" (lo amato troncone), and say, "Where will I rest, then? Under what shade will I now sing my verses?" (Ove dunque mi riposerò io? Sotto qual'ombra omai canterò i miei versi?) Upon awakening from this dream, Sincero travels back to his hometown, where he discovers that his nightmarish vision has told the truth and that his beloved has in fact prematurely died in his absence. The "very beautiful orange tree" in this shepherd's dream, a tree that he "had tended with much care," represents the woman he loved; the felling of the dreamed-of tree, then, coincided with her death and loss.¹⁴ Written by the Neapolitan poet and humanist Jacopo Sannazaro (1458–1530), *Arcadia* was the first in the new genre of the pastoral romance

and a veritable bestseller, as well as being widely influential; it circulated for several years in manuscript form before being printed in Naples in 1504. Sannazaro's inclusion of an orange tree is closely tied both to early modern representations of oranges as the fruit of love and melancholia at once, and to the city of Naples as Sannazaro's home and as a land hospitable to the growing of oranges. The cultivation of citrus fruit requires year-round mild temperatures and abundant water, elements present in Naples and its surrounding region, Campania.

An attention to citrus fruit is especially evident in texts produced in the area around Naples because of the long-standing association of its region of Campania with the arrival and the cultivation of this botanical genus in Italy. Although the knowledge and cultivation in Italy of at least some citrus fruit goes back to antiquity (citron, notably and perhaps exclusively), it is in the early modern period, and also thanks to the praise received in the work of writers and artists, that citrus fruit achieved great popularity, particularly as a horticultural ornament. Thus, we read of citrons abounding in the gardens of Giovanni Boccaccio's prose and as one of the glories of the city of Naples, where Boccaccio had spent some of his formative years in the 1300s. In the fifteenth century Flavio Biondo da Forlì wrote of the mountainous area around Amalfi, not far from Naples and to this day renowned for its large and flavourful lemons, that "it is all full of citrons, oranges, pomegranates, and other very beautiful fruit, which as a consequences Naples abounds in, and enjoys" (*è tutta piena di cedri, di aranci, di granati, e d'altri bellissimi frutti, de li quali ne viene Napoli ad abundare, et a goderne*; 238). The gardens of the Neapolitan waterfront in the sixteenth century were adorned with "many scented citron and orange trees, which at all times exhale sweet scents because of the abundant white flowers that regularly bloom among their golden branches" (*tanti arbori odoriferi di Cedri, & Aranci che d'ogni tempo spirano soavi odori, per tanti bianchi fiori che d'hor'in ora fioriscono tra tanti rami d'oro*; Di Falco, n.p.). Of nearby Sorrento it was written in 1595 that the "town abounds in all sorts of fruit ... particularly lemons, citrons, small lemons, and bitter oranges, which fruit is not so important for the money derived from its sales as much as for the way it beautifies places, gardens, and villas, showing a verdant Springtime in the middle of the most horrendous winter" (*il paese è abundante d'ogni sorte di frutti ... particolarmente di limoni, cedri, limoncelli, e melangole, lo qual frutto non tanto opra l'effetto dell'utile, che si cava dal prezzo, quando che abellisce il luogo, i giardini, e le delitie, scorgendosi nel più horrido inverno, una verdegiante Primavera*; Vitignano 17). And about Naples, in

an eighteenth-century text, we read that there are many “citron, orange, and lemon gardens: they bloom mostly twice a year, and with their scent make you enjoy an earthly paradise” (giardini di cedri, d’aranci e di limoni, che quando fioriscono, che per lo più son due volte in ogni anno, fan coll’odore godere un terrestre Paradiso; Celano 246–7).

It is another early modern Neapolitan writer, however, the humanist Giovanni Gioviano Pontano (1426–1503), who most influentially portrayed citrus fruit in literature as a signifier of the beauty, antiquity, and resilience of his beloved Campania, by associating citrus fruit both to this region and to the classical antiquity that was so widely admired in the Italian Renaissance. The preferred geography of citrus fruit, a sun- and water-loving botanical genus if there ever was one, and the confusion among its varieties, such as citrons and oranges, are indeed central to Pontano’s *De hortis Hesperidum, sive de cultu citriorum* (On the garden of the Hesperides, or about the cultivation of citrus), a long Latin poem in two books and the first major literary treatment of citrus fruit.¹⁵ Composed in Naples (where Pontano had made his home at the age of twenty-two) by the end of the year 1500 and first published in Venice by the celebrated press of Aldus Manutius in 1501, *De hortis Hesperidum* is a poetic combination of agricultural science and mythical tales, both classical and invented, unfolding around the myth of Venus and Adonis. In Carlo Caruso’s book on the presence of the myth of Adonis in the Italian Renaissance we read that “at the end of the fifteenth century the story of Adonis caught the eye of a truly gifted poet in the person of Giovanni Pontano, who produced the first highly personalized revisitation of the Adoniac myth in the modern age” (6). Tolkowsky describes Pontano’s poem as “the first known treatise of citriculture of European authorship, which owed its inspiration to the aged author’s recollection of the days when he and his wife, still young, found their greatest joy in looking after the orange-trees of their garden on the Vomero at Naples” (186). Italian botanist and citrus specialist Francesco Calabrese, however, dismisses Pontano’s poem as a work that “is of low lyrical value and is of no scientific interest” (4). As the earliest modern text to explicitly identify the classical golden apples guarded by the Hesperides sisters as specifically citrus fruit, *De hortis Hesperidum* was also the first modern text to establish explicitly a distinguished mythological past for a botanical genus that, though relatively new, was quickly achieving great popularity in early modern Europe.

As the title of his work indicates, Pontano recognized as citrus the golden apples growing in the mythological Garden of the Hesperides, those fabled fruits that were the object of Hercules’s eleventh labour.

Largely because of Pontano's work, in the course of the Renaissance the golden apples of ancient myth came to be widely regarded as a variety of citrus – bitter oranges or citrons most commonly. Obviously no one knows exactly what fruit the golden apples of the Hesperides referred to, or whether indeed they referred to a real fruit at all. For a long time during antiquity the golden apples were usually believed to be quinces, although some later ancient authors such as the Elder Pliny and Martial may have thought of them as citrons (Andrews 38–41) because they had a strong and pleasant smell but were nevertheless inedible.¹⁶ By the second half of the second century some ancient Greek and Roman authors considered the golden apples of the Hesperides to be identical to the fruit of the citron tree, a tree that is believed to have been very well established in Greece by then. It is difficult, however, if not altogether impossible, to be sure about this identification because of persistent terminological uncertainties (Tolkowsky 74–5).¹⁷ This taxonomical confusion is most dramatically expressed in the frequent mistaking of the cedar – the name of a precious wood that was in vogue in the ancient world, namely the conifer present in the Hebrew Bible, associated with Lebanon, and known as *cedrus* or *citrus* (from the Greek *kedros*) – and the citron, which is a completely different botanical genus. Surprisingly, this mistake, probably due to the fact that citrons were not generally thought of as a food and shared with cedars a strong and distinctive scent, lasted well into the nineteenth century and may be found, for example, in Risso and Poiteau's 1818 *Histoire naturelle des oranges*. Even in Alberto Marinis's Italian horticultural manual from 1888, *L'amante dei fiori* (The flower lover), the cedar is listed among citrus trees, with a specific reference to the cedar of Lebanon that is made in a language so vague that it is not clear whether the author actually realizes that cedars and citrons are two different trees altogether (179).

Regardless of terminological misunderstandings, Pontano's identification of the golden apples of the Garden of the Hesperides with citrus fruit proved very successful and eventually led to the creation of the scientific term *hesperidium* (plural, *hesperidia*), derived from Linnaeus's Latin *hesperidae* and used in English at least since the nineteenth century to describe citrus fruit. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *hesperidium* is "a fruit with sectioned pulp inside a separable rind, e.g. an orange or grapefruit." Already by 1646 Giovanni Battista Ferrari, in the first scholarly work entirely devoted to citrus fruit, *Hesperides*, could repeatedly and self-assuredly refer to citrus, even on his first page and with

his very title, as the fruit from the Garden of the Hesperides and place on his frontispiece an engraving of a statue of Hercules holding three golden apples in his hand (Ferrari's work will be discussed at length in the next chapter).

In his study of the acclimatization of citrus fruit in the Mediterranean region Alfred Andrews notes that "as in the case of lemons and limes, so too with oranges, there has been a tendency in both the Middle Age and modern times to apply the name of the citron without discrimination" (46). Pontano's text has been interpreted as ambiguous in this regard, and interpretations of the trees and fruits described in *De hortis Hesperidum* vary, with the primary tree having been translated as either an orange or a citron (e.g., Tallarigo 605–6). This is because the Latin word that Pontano uses for the tree fruit into which Venus's lover Adonis is transformed is *citrum*, a word normally used for citrons and not for oranges (it is translated in the 1761 Italian edition as *cedro*, citron). At the same time, Pontano sometimes qualifies this very "*citrum*" as "sweet," and thus it is reasonable to deduce that he is referring to the sweet orange and not the very sour citron. Caruso makes a good case that, although Pontano's *De hortis Hesperidum* discusses the cultivation of sour oranges, citrons, and lemons, it is into what he sees as the noblest variety of citrus fruit, the orange, that Adonis is transformed by his grieving lover, Venus (11). Caruso also notes that Pontano's inclusion of sweet oranges in his poem "appears to be one of the earliest allusions to 'sweet oranges' or *portogalli*, thus named after the Portuguese crew of Vasco da Gama that first came upon them" (13), thus making of the *De hortis Hesperidum* "almost certainly the first published text in verse, to report on the existence of the newly discovered variety of oranges" (14).

Venus, as we have seen in the previous section of this chapter, was closely associated with oranges in early modern representations of the fruit, also because of the bittersweet experience brought on by both oranges and love. In *De hortis Hesperidum*, Venus plays a crucial role throughout Pontano's narrative concerning the origin of oranges. According to ancient myth, after her beloved Adonis is killed by a wild boar, Venus transforms his remains into a plant; specifically, Venus turns Adonis's blood into a red flower. The best-known ancient version of the myth of Adonis is found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in which the young man's blood is transformed into a red anemone by the nectar that Venus pours on her lover's mangled corpse. Pontano, however, changes Ovid's anemone, a fragile and notoriously short-lived flower, into an evergreen citrus tree, through

a rewriting of the Adonis myth that, as we read in Caruso's book, was "the first highly personalized revisitation of the Adoniac myth in the modern age" (6) and that "was in due course to become extremely influential" (11).

In this reinterpretation Pontano borrows from another Ovidian metamorphosis, that of the nymph Daphne into a laurel tree, a metamorphosis effected while Daphne was still alive and being pursued by the god Apollo – a tree rather than a flower, then, and, like citrus, an evergreen. As was the case for Ovid's Daphne, it is the whole of Adonis's body that is transformed in Pontano's tale, rather than just his blood as in Ovid's version of Adonis's tale, and the literal citrus tree – only tenuously endowed, by the sixteenth century, with literary connotations, unlike the highly symbolic and exalted laurel tree – acquires some of the value of the classical laurel tree that was so beloved of Renaissance literati. In Virgil's *Georgics*, the agricultural poem on which Pontano loosely modelled his *De hortis Hesperidum*, the Roman poet had explicitly compared the citron tree with the laurel tree (51; bk. II, lines 133–6), and Pontano as well points out the similarity between these two plants (lines 28–9). In Ovid it is Daphne's feet that turn into roots, and her hair into leafy fronds, as she runs away from Apollo who is passionately pursuing her (a favorite representation of this story is Gian Lorenzo Bernini's magnificent marble sculpture, on exhibit at the Borghese Gallery in Rome). In Pontano the roots of the citrus tree grow out of the hair on Adonis's head; Adonis is lying down, so the analogy of feet and roots as the lowest portions of both human and arboreal bodies does not necessarily have to apply – as it did with the upright, running Daphne. By turning Adonis into a tree, Pontano brings full circle the earlier transformation of his incestuous mother, Myrrha, who had turned into a myrrh tree while pregnant with Adonis, even as Adonis remained quite human (more will be said about Myrrha and her botanical pregnancy, with its difficult birth, at the beginning of my next chapter). Also, by explicitly relating his citrus tree to Ovid's laurel tree, Pontano, it has been argued, compared his new poetry, symbolized by the citrus, to the ancient Apollinean poetry of the classical antiquity (Nuovo 456).

Citrus fruits seem especially apt for this transformation into the human body given their association through Venus with sex and reproduction, but also, in more practical ways, because their propensity for deformity sometimes gives them a human shape, and specifically one reminiscent at times of male or female genitalia. Such deformed fruits were known to grow especially south of Naples, in the region of Calabria (Tallarigo

610–11), where they were noticed by the Southern Italian philosopher Tommaso Campanella (1568–1639). In his book *De sensu rerum et magia* (On the sense of things and on magic, 1620) Campanella wrote that near Nicastro, in his native region of Calabria, he saw “large lemons and citrons, some of which were formed by nature in the shape of a man’s hand with fingers ... others like a heart, others like a penis with the foreskin and testicles; others exactly like a vulva, so that you may laugh and marvel at the same time” (Citria & limones grandes, quorum alia formantur a natura instar manus hominis cum digitis ... alia sicut cor, alia sicut veretrum cum praeputio & testibus: alia sicut cunnus omnino, ut rideas ac mireris simul; 189, bk. IV, ch. 14). This kind of deformity, by the way, clearly continues to attract the attention of citrus lovers, as evidenced in the numerous contemporary images of strangely shaped citrus fruit, including fruit shaped like human genitals, which are easily found through a simple Internet image search.

One may ask why Pontano – who was writing in Latin at the height of the antiquity-loving Italian Renaissance – rejected the well-known classical anemone flower into which Ovid had skilfully turned Adonis, and changed it instead into a citrus tree, a far less familiar or illustrious botanical specimen. It has been persuasively argued that a precise ideological project was at work in this botanical substitution on the part of Pontano’s poetry, a project closely related to other literary citrus choices, as I will argue in the next section of this chapter. In *De hortis Hesperidum*, Pontano celebrates the landscape of his beloved Campania, the region surrounding Naples; he had made his home in Naples at the age of twenty-two and had been happy there, and his exaltation of citrus trees, which grow so well in the Campanian countryside, is “an *aition* intended to explain the presence of citrus trees on the Neapolitan shore” (Caruso 11).

The focus on citrus underscores the connection, too, between the mythical Garden of the Hesperides and the geographical, but not yet political, reality that was Italy, and especially southern Italy and Campania. Hesperia (the western land) was one of Italy’s ancient names used by the Greeks. The name Hesperia was also repeatedly used by Pontano himself in his *De hortis Hesperidum* to refer to Campania specifically. In turn, its name connected Hesperia with the goddess of love because Hesperus is a personification of the evening star, the planet Venus; in fact, even the Latin word for citrus, *citrum*, was sometimes para-etymologically associated with the adjective *cythereum*, that is, Cytherean, or belonging to Venus through her birthplace, the Greek island of Cythera (Caruso 15).

Through an analysis of Pontano's oeuvre as a whole, it has been advanced that Pontano is responsible for the creation of the myth of Naples and its surroundings, a myth that exalted this area's cultural grandeur and geographical splendour, represented the local landscape as magnificent and timeless, and transfigured this land into a new classical Greece of sorts.¹⁸

Through the poetic association with Venus and with the Garden of the Hesperides, and through his emphasis on the most sensuous and fertile qualities of this beautiful and scented botanical genus – symbolic of Campania and of love at once – Pontano glorifies citrus trees, thereby reinstating the aesthetic qualities of a land that, despite the devastation brought about by foreign invasions, had nevertheless managed to preserve its stunning beauty and local culture. The evergreen nature and long life of citrus trees, their fruitfulness both real and symbolic, and even their perceived immortality, Pontano implies, and not the ephemeral nature of the beautiful but fragile anemone, correspond to the immortality of Campania itself (Nuovo 456). The citrus tree memorializes the love of Venus and Adonis through its perennial flowering, its always renewed scent, and the cool shade of its evergreen branches. The orange tree, occasionally named *Aphrodisia citrius* in the Renaissance – after Aphrodite, Venus's Greek name – is born from this metamorphosis: through tears, kisses, and ointments the goddess of love operates a metamorphosis on the corpse of Adonis. Citrus is for Pontano the fruit of Venus, the fruit of love. The Italian Renaissance, with its admiration for all things classical, revived the fascination with the fruit growing in the mythological Garden of the Hesperides, and a study of the representation of oranges in Pontano's *De hortis Hesperidum* exposes how the text lies at the very heart of this revival.

Women and Fruit in Basile's "The Three Citrons"

Giambattista Basile's baroque fairy tale "The Three Citrons" ("Li tre cetra" in the original Neapolitan) features a king's son whose notable trait in the beginning of the story is a melancholy bent. This attitude is manifested in apathy and an absolute refusal to take a wife. Depending on the edition, this protagonist is called either Cenzullo or Ciommetiello; since Ciommetella is the name of the frame-story narrator of Basile's collection *The Tale of Tales*, the similarity between her name and that of the king's son is one of the elements that make this tale an "explicit echo of the frame tale, which precedes and follows it at the same time" (Decroisette 128). One day, upon slicing some ricotta with a knife, Cenzullo, or

Ciommetiello, cuts one of his fingers, and the sight of blood spreading on the white cheese shakes him out of his listlessness. These colours make him wish for a wife with a complexion as white as the ricotta on his plate and as red as his own blood, a wife who becomes the object of his appetite.¹⁹ He leaves his home, against his father's wishes, in search of this imagined woman, and while he is on a distant island all the way across the ocean, an ancient ogress gives the king's son "three citrons that seemed to have been just picked from the tree, and gave him also a good knife" (*tre cetra che parevano tanno tanno cogliute dall'arvolo e dezele ancora no bello cortiello*; "Li tre cetra" 469). The ogress tells him to cut open one of the citrons when he is close to his own kingdom, at the first fountain he finds, and to quickly give water to the maiden who will emerge from it. Although the two maidens that come out of the first two fruits die of thirst, the third one survives – the king's son has learned to be faster in watering the newborn fairy. She is naked, however, so the young man must fetch her some court-appropriate clothes while she hides in the foliage of a nearby tree.

A dark-skinned servant comes to the fountain to fetch water for her mistress and discovers the hidden citron maiden; out of envy for her beauty the servant kills her. Upon her death, the fairy is immediately transformed into a white dove and flies away. When the king's son returns, the murderous servant passes herself off to him as the maiden; she explains that, because she is the victim of an enchantment, she must spend part of the year under a different guise, sporting a dark-skin colouring and a foreign accent. The king's son falls for it and marries the impostor. The citron-girl-turned-dove, meanwhile, visits the royal kitchens to inquire about her beloved. She is eventually killed by the cook at the impostor's orders and baked into a gratin. But out of the dove's remains – consisting of feathers and of the water in which the bird had been scalded for plucking – a citron tree quickly springs up. The tree produces exactly three fruits, which the king's son brings with him into a locked room, together "with a large cup of water and the very same knife that he always carried hanging at his side" (*co na gran tassa d'acqua e co lo medesimo cortiello che portava sempre appiso a lato*; "Li tre cetra" 476). This knife had been given to him by the ogress and is reminiscent of the original knife with which he had cut himself, thus starting the whole adventure. The beloved fairy, twice killed – once in her human form, the other as a dove – comes out of the third citron; her two fellow citron sisters had once more died due to the young man's slowness in watering them. The fairy is immediately given water, just as she had been

earlier in the story. At the end the impostor wife is executed by burning, which is the very punishment she herself had chosen for whoever turned out to be the fairy's killer when she did not yet know that her own culpability had been discovered. In fairy-tale style the king's son is finally and forever united in happy marriage to the creature who has twice sprung out of a citrus fruit.

Owing to the early modern association of oranges, love, and melancholia and to the connection forged by Pontano between citrus fruit and Campania, the Neapolitan baroque writer Giambattista Basile (1566–1632) was able to use citrons as effective images of love in his literary fairy tale. "The Three Citrons" is the last story before the conclusion of Basile's frame narrative, elements of which – including melancholy – recur within the tale. Basile's magnum opus, the collection known as *The Tale of Tales, Or Entertainment for Little Ones* (*Lo cunto de li cunti ovvero lo trattenemiento de peccerille*), is generally regarded as the oldest published collection in Europe consisting entirely of fairy tales – the earliest published fairy tales are found in the Venetian Giovan Francesco Straparola's *Le piacevoli notti* (1550–5; *The Pleasant Nights*), though only about fifteen of the seventy-five short stories in this book qualify as fairy tales. Basile's *Tale of Tales* contains several narratives that later became classics of the genre in Europe, including "Cinderella" ("La gatta Cenerentola"), "Sleeping Beauty" ("Sole, Luna e Talia"), and "Rapunzel" ("Petrosinella"), and is thus a crucial point of reference in fairy-tale studies. Basile's book is also known as the *Pentamerone* (*Pentameron*), a title chosen by its first publisher to note the book's structural similarity to Boccaccio's *Decameron*.

Basile's book takes place over five days instead of Boccaccio's ten, and Basile's ten narrators, each of whom tells one story a day, are not Boccaccio's beautiful young men and women. Instead, reflecting the sense of humour and the penchant for the grotesque that distinguish Basile's writings, they are ugly and deformed old crones, endowed with defects, such as a goitre and a hunched back, that are reflected in their nicknames. Basile's ten narrators, furthermore, are all women because, as many critics have noted, early modern European fairy tales were fundamentally a female genre, a genre that originated largely for and about women (Rak, *Da Cenerentola a Cappuccetto Rosso* xvi; Tucker 8). *The Tale of Tales* was published posthumously in 1634–6 in Naples. It was immensely popular and was reprinted six times in the seventeenth century alone, despite the fact that it was written in a difficult Neapolitan language that was complicated by an ornate baroque style. This aesthetic, however arduous for the general reader to appreciate, successfully expressed Basile's

debt to popular culture and his fascination with the strange and the monstrous, with the rare and the hybrid, and with metamorphosis – traits that figure prominently as well in the botanical history of citrus fruit. Basile's book is also notable for its fusion of elite and popular references and is a hybrid of sorts; it draws both from high-brow literature and from oral storytelling and ironically subtiles itself *Entertainment for Little Ones* although it is clearly not addressed to children. In fact, the profane, obscene, and often scatological aspects of Basile's fairy tales are an important reason they never became canonical in a genre that was increasingly associated with the nursery over the centuries of its development.

"The Three Citrons" is the earliest known printed version of the ATU 408 tale type known as "The Three Oranges" and originating in the Mediterranean region.²⁰ In her in-depth study of ATU 408, Goldberg notes that "there is a Portuguese reference in 1605 to a tale with the same title," but we do not have a copy of it. Goldberg also points out that "since Basile's version lacks two episodes common in oral tradition, it is unlikely that it is the source of the oral tradition of The Three Oranges; rather, Basile's The Three Citrons is based on oral tradition" (37). As this pre-seventeenth-century oral tradition is impossible to recover, however, Basile's version – even though it may have been derived from earlier instances of this tale type – remains fundamental and involves a number of elements common to all of the tale type's versions; the most important among them is a cluster of three fruits out of which the same number of enchanted maidens emerge. Although the name of the ATU 408 tale type specifically mentions oranges, there are many botanical variations on the identity of this central fruit. In a footnote to his own 1956 adaptation of ATU 408, "The Love of the Three Pomegranates" ("L'amore delle tre melagrane"), Italo Calvino states that there are "forty other Italian versions" of this fairy tale; they feature a variety of fruit, including, Calvino catalogues, "watermelons, lemons, oranges, apples, pomegranates, or *melangole* (which means in some places 'oranges,' in others 'bitter oranges')" (*Italian Folktales* 738).

Possibly the best known among the versions of ATU 408 is Carlo Gozzi's eighteenth-century Venetian play *The Love of the Three Oranges* (*L'amore delle tre melarance*). Gozzi uses the same term as Catherine of Siena did a few centuries earlier to refer to his symbolic fruit, *melarancia*. The theatrical fairy tale premiered on the stage in Venice in 1761, with great popular success, and was first printed in 1772.²¹ It was from Gozzi's theatrical version that Sergei Prokofiev derived his homonymous satirical opera in 1919.²² As one critic has pointed out, and fitting with the symbolism of

oranges in early modern Europe, all versions of “The Three Oranges” (including and perhaps especially Gozzi’s) are about melancholy, primarily because they feature a listless prince as a protagonist: “Melancholy is the theme that dominates all versions of *The Love of the Three Oranges*. It is the image of a power that *cannot*. According to Walter Benjamin, the Prince becomes with the passing of time, beginning in the Renaissance, the paradigm of melancholy” (La malinconia è il tema che domina tutte le versioni de *L’amore delle tre melarance*. È l’immagine di un potere che *non può*. Il Principe diventa secondo Benjamin nel corso del tempo, a partire dal Rinascimento, il paradigma della malinconia; Barbalato 85). Armando Maggi aptly calls “The Three Citrons” a story “of obsessive melancholy” (101). In fairy tales as in the visual arts, citrus fruit had become a way of expressing melancholy in the Italian Renaissance, for their similar names and for the bitterness they shared.

Given the historical primacy of “The Three Citrons,” and the emphasis given to citrons in Basile’s tale, it is noteworthy that the best-known examples of this tale type do not contain citrons at all. Basile’s version of ATU 408 does not feature any of the popular fruits listed by Calvino some three centuries later, although of course Calvino knew Basile’s version quite well. Rather, the fruit from which this seventeenth-century version derives its title, the citron, is today among the least known in the citrus family and is hardly ever encountered other than in its candied form; sold diced and boxed, often dyed a toxic-looking green, and ready to be added to sweet confections especially, all resemblance to the actual citron fruit is lost along the way. Citron is a fruit whose pale yellow-green colour, bitter and sour flavour, and even masculine grammatical gender (tree fruit in Italian commonly takes the feminine gender: *arancio* is the orange tree, and *arancia* is the fruit that grows on said tree; the word *cefra* in Basile’s title may look feminine at first, but it is a masculine plural, as the article *li* also indicates) make it an odd choice for symbolizing and containing a female object of desire – unlike, say, the pomegranates of Calvino’s version, which are white, red, and sweet like the protagonist’s longed-for wife, as well as being grammatically feminine. Pomegranates, such as those in Calvino’s version of ATU 408, are native to the Mediterranean region, are frequently at work in ancient Greek and Roman symbolism, and embody the red and white colours that Basile’s protagonist so longs for in a future wife. As a scholar notes, “the pomegranate’s oldest and deepest symbolic associations are with life, fertility, and reproduction. Both the fruit and the tree were common totems of maternal deities in particular” (Ruis 22–3). The same, however, cannot

be said of citrons. Citrons may well be the oldest among all citrus to come to Europe, and the ones from which the name of the entire genus is derived, but citrus fruits in general are relative newcomers to the European landscape, as we have seen; the scope of citrons, in antiquity and into the early modern era, seems to have been limited to Jewish ritual and their traditional use in the Feast of Tabernacles. The history of citrons as symbols was a rather limited and relatively brief one, at the time Basile was writing, which gave a certain freedom to those who used images of citrus fruit in their writings – a freedom not available in representations of fruits such as pomegranates, figs, or grapes, and a freedom further enhanced by the general confusion between different types of citrus.

Basile's baroque aesthetic certainly relies on odd contrasts and surprising turns of phrase throughout this collection of fairy tales, and readers may be inclined to overlook the strangeness of the citron in a context where so much else is strange. Nevertheless, this author's literary choice of citrons in this particular fairy tale as the botanical sign of love and sex, as a symbol of that perceived lack we call desire and so often compare to hunger, is not quite as odd or surprising as it might at first appear, when it is contextualized within the early modern cultural representations of citrus fruit. As we have seen with Giorgione's *Double Portrait*, these representations associated bitter oranges with the melancholia brought on, for example, by romantic love, and in these representations citrus fruits were often confused with one another because a clear nomenclature for the new botanical genus had not yet been established.

It is well known that Basile's *Tale of Tales* is tightly connected to the cultural geography of Naples and Campania, most obviously through its language; the book is written in a baroque and highly literary Neapolitan language, and even the proper names of places and characters are given in Neapolitan rather than Italian.²³ Basile also draws heavily from Neapolitan folklore and customs, including proverbs, songs, games, and food traditions. Specifically, "The Three Citrons," in addition to including several of these Neapolitan elements, takes its title and main metaphor from a family of plants, citrus, that was by the seventeenth century firmly identified, thanks first of all to Pontano's Latin poem *De hortis Hesperidum*, with the region of Naples and Campania – thus embodying, as the sign of popular agriculture and of elite culture at once, the very hybrid nature of Basile's fairy tales as a genre. Perhaps because of the association of ATU 408, "The Three Oranges," with this warm-weather crop, this tale type is popular in southern Europe and the Middle East but entirely absent from northern European collections such as those

of the Grimm brothers. This geographical connection has led to the assumption that ATU 408 originated in southern Europe and perhaps even, as Calvino surmises in his introduction to *Italian Folktales*, in Italy – which would make it the only folktale “that can be considered of probable Italian origin” (Calvino xxviii). Plant geography, then, is instrumental to a full understanding of Basile’s Mediterranean tale, since “The Three Citrons,” like other stories in the *The Tale of Tales*, is firmly anchored in the geography of Naples and its surrounding region.

Although plant geography and the connection of citrus fruit with Campania are clear in both Pontano and Basile, I have mentioned a certain confusion in citrus nomenclature throughout early modern Italy, a confusion that affects the work of both authors. From Basile’s description of their colour, shape, and taste, the three magical fruits in “The Three Citrons” can be identified as citrons or a type of lemon: the lemons from Campania’s Amalfi Coast, also sung in Pontano’s book and still regarded by many as the best in Italy, are every bit as large as a typical citron. Whether Pontano meant citrons in particular or, as Caruso claims, sweet oranges from the tree into which Venus turned the corpse of her beloved Adonis, or even another type of citrus fruit altogether, Pontano’s self-assured identification of citrus fruit with the fruit that was growing in the classical Garden of the Hesperides would have given Basile’s citrons, at least among the educated reading public of his time, a cultural recognition that is largely lost on us today. The identification of the precious golden apples of Greek mythology with our common eating oranges is certainly not as evident now as it was to Italian Renaissance readers – when the symbolic import of citrus fruit, including citrons, as the golden apples of Greek myth bound them inextricably to love and sex; the golden apple, as we have seen, was the bitter orange, Venus’s own fruit according to a Renaissance imbrication of botany with mythology. An inquiry into Basile’s choice of citrons as the fruit at the heart of his tale reveals this choice to be far from just another baroque clever twist; rather, in early modern Europe, citrons carried connotations that are lost to us today, connotations that helped shape the meaning and significance of this Neapolitan fairy story.

Citrus Fruit and the Literary Dignity of Fairy Tales

Citrons are the earliest citrus fruit to have arrived in Italy from Asia, their spread aided by the Jewish diaspora and the use of citrons as indispensable ritual objects in the Festival of Tabernacles, or Sukkot – the thanksgiving, post-harvest ritual of Jewish tradition, a holiday coloured green,

like the palm fronds used in the celebration, and gold, like its citrons. Starting around 40 BCE, the citron became one of the most common motifs on Jewish inscriptions, mosaics, tombs, and ritual objects, to the point that the presence of images of citron in ancient Roman remains is considered sufficient evidence to suggest a Jewish presence or influence (Isaac 179–83).²⁴ By the second century BCE, citrons had become an important fruit for the Jewish people, and it was widely admitted that the etrog, the heart-shaped citron preferred for this holiday, symbolized divine benevolence and was accepted as “the fruit of the goodly tree” described in the Hebrew Scriptures (Leviticus 23:40).²⁵ Citrons used in the Sukkot ritual must be kosher, which means that they must come from a tree grown from seed, and not one propagated through grafting, as was common in citriculture. Suitable citrons also must be freshly picked, have at least part of the stalk attached to the fruit, and display a perfectly undamaged skin; no bruises or scratches ought to be visible, not even under a magnifying glass. What to do with all those imperfect citrons, those citrons that, because the stalk had come off the fruit or because their skin was bruised, could not be used for Sukkot? One such use is told in an entertaining Midrash story about the biblical episode of the virtuous Joseph and the Egyptian Potiphar’s lustful wife (Genesis 39), an episode thought to have taken place in the sixteenth century BCE.

Joseph, sold into slavery by his brothers, is taken to Egypt where he enters the house of the powerful captain of the Egyptian palace guard, Potiphar – whose complete trust Joseph quickly earns. But Potiphar’s wife wants to bed Joseph and, when she fails in her attempts at seducing him, she falsely accuses Joseph of attempting to rape her. The Midrash is a form of rabbinical literature that fills in and interprets biblical stories, and this citron Midrash story suggests, contrary to the implications that are so clear in Genesis 39, that the infatuation of Potiphar’s wife with Joseph was common knowledge at court and therefore hardly something to be dissimulated with lies about Joseph’s own miscreant desires – as the official Genesis story would have us believe. The citron story is told in several texts, including the early medieval collection known as *Midrash Tanhuma*, compiled in approximately the seventh or eighth century CE. The story has been retold by Bible scholar James Kugel: “On one occasion, the Egyptian women gathered and went to behold Joseph’s beauty. What did Potiphar’s wife do? She took citrons and gave them to each of them and gave each a knife and then called to Joseph and stood him before them. When they beheld how handsome Joseph was, they cut their hands. She said to them: If you do thus after one moment, I who see him every moment, am I not all the more so [justified in being smitten]?” (29).

Citrus fruit is characterized by a thick, leathery, and oily rind. Citron, in particular, has the thickest rind of all citrus fruit; in fact, the rind of the citron is consumed (usually, pressed for oil and/or candied) much more often than the negligible amount of pulp and juice that the fruit contains. Thus, a sharp knife is definitely needed to tackle citrons – so that when the ogress gives three citrons to the king’s son in Basile’s “The Three Citrons,” she does not forget to give him also a knife. That Mrs Potiphar intended for her women friends to eat the citrons (rather than just scent their hands by handling them, as was sometimes the custom with citrus fruit; Tolkowsky 9) is confirmed by another Midrash version of the story, in which Potiphar’s wife gives her friends, in addition to a knife, some bread and meat, and by an analogous story present in the Qur’an, in which an entire feast, rather than just a citron, is laid out for the ladies – who once more cut their hands with their knives when Joseph appears. (In addition to appearing in the Qu’ran, the story of Potiphar’s wife, her friends, and the citrons is later elaborated by Muslim poets and exegetes of later times, with a variety of different foods presented at table; Kugel 31–5.) Sharp knives, as a rule, do not mix well with distracting sights and sexy objects of desire. The friends of Potiphar’s wife are no exception to this rule, and they pay with hand wounds for feasting their eyes on the handsome Joseph. What this citron story reveals, through the unveiling of the friends’ desire, is the openness of Potiphar’s wife’s own desire; there is something about citrus fruit that calls forth one’s identity, making it impossible to lie about who one is, or about what one wants (this was also the case with Brusati’s Nino in *Bread and Chocolate*). Contrary to the Genesis narrative, in which the powerful married Egyptian woman takes great pains to hide her adulterous wants – and Joseph is in danger precisely because Potiphar’s wife has been so successful in hiding her infatuation with him – here we see a woman intent on justifying her own desire by proving its unavoidability to a jury of her peers. Any woman would lose her cool in Joseph’s presence: just look at those cut-up hands on the Egyptian ladies!²⁶

In drawing from Pontano’s citrus imagery and its connection with the region of Campania, Basile acquires a more exalted literary status – that of high-brow Latin poetry inspired by classical authors – for the new and popular literary genre in which he was writing, fairy tales. Pride of place through the praise of a local product such as citrus fruit is central to Basile’s Neapolitan fairy tale, as it is to Pontano’s Latin poem. In Basile’s tale the king’s son chooses to travel far to find his ideal wife, even going beyond the Columns of Hercules and as far as the Indies, that is, the New

World – and significantly this is the only trans-oceanic voyage of the entire *Pentameron*. When he departs, the young man goes “in the direction of the Strait of Gibraltar ... and sails on in the direction of the Indies” (a la vota de lo stritto de Gebelterra ... passae a la vota dell’Innie; “Li tre cetra” 468). His is a long trip indeed, but still the ogress he meets there, on the Island of the Ogresses, after giving him the three citrons and the knife, tells him: “You may go back to Italy, since your spindle is full and you found what you were looking for. Go away then and as soon as you are not far from your kingdom, at the first fountain you find, cut up one citron and a fairy will come out of it.” (Puoi tornare a la Talia, che hai chieno lo fuso ed hai trovato chello che vai cercanno. Vattenne adonca e comme si poco lontano de lo regno tuio a la pria Fontana che truove taglia no citro, che ne scerrà na fata; 470.) Despite his long and dangerous voyage through lands and waters both real (the Straits of Gibraltar) and invented (the Island of the Ogresses), it is near his own kingdom in Italy that the king’s son will find what he seeks in the citrons he has obtained in a faraway land.

In addition to this emphasis on place and the related motif of the citrus – primarily as a tree in Pontano, primarily as a fruit in Basile – the parallels between Pontano’s and Basile’s texts extend into the details of their literary transformations into, or out of, citrus. The citron’s metamorphosis in Basile’s tale brings about the beloved’s presence and her very life, rather than being predicated, as in Pontano’s poem, on the beloved’s death. But there is plenty of death in “The Three Citrons,” too, for the prince’s future bride does die twice in the story, and after her second death and plucking, as a dove, her remains are turned, like Adonis’s, into a citrus tree – as the fruit of love, citrus is also the fruit of life and rebirth. As well, before the third citron fairy is given water quickly enough for her to survive her own birth, the king’s son does lose two other potential brides – trapped within the first two citrons and not watered in time upon their coming into the world. The prince’s reaction to this initial double loss is similar to Venus’s at Adonis’s demise in Pontano’s poem: self-harm, literal or metaphorical, and especially a superabundance of watery tears. Like other elements, such as the image of the fountain and the conflict between a white-skinned and a dark-skinned woman (the dark-skinned servant’s punishment in “The Three Citrons” helps unmask the similarly dark-skinned impostor in the frame narrative), tears provide another connection between “The Three Citrons” and the frame narrative of the *Pentameron*, where the king’s daughter must within three days fill a jug with her tears if she is to save the prince. Through these parallels

between the last tale and the frame narrative, with “The Three Citrons” Basile seems to be making claims for his book as a whole and perhaps, more ambitiously, even for literary fairy tales as a genre.

In both Basile’s and Pontano’s texts the melancholy lover’s tears of despair are directly compared with the water needed for the survival of plant life, and especially citrus plants – the very water that is abundant in Campania and that allows it to be a favoured agricultural location. In “The Three Citrons” we learn that the king’s son, after the loss of the first two fairies, “turning his eyes into flowing streams, was gushing tears drop by drop, brow to brow, blow by blow, face to face, and one on one with the fountain” (*facenno duie pescericole dell’uocchie iettava lagreme a tocce a tocce, a fronte a fronte, a tuzzo a tuzzo, a facce a facce ed a tu a tu co la Fontana; “Li tre cetra” 470*). This is the same fountain from which he draws water to give to the creatures who come out of the citrons, thus following the ogress’s clear orders. So also Pontano’s poem describes Venus’s tears as they spread on earth and trees much like nourishing rainwater:

Venus grieved because the boy was dead, she mourned her lover and tore out her hair, and the ground was wet with the tears she shed; the laurel trees, at whose feet and under whose leafy shade she placed and mourned Adonis, were wet, and, forgetting she was a goddess, she struck her breasts with both hands.

(*Maerebat puero extincto, lugebat amantem
scissa comam, et lacrimis humebat terra profusis,
humebant lauri, quarum frondente sub umbra
et positum ante pedes lamentabatur Adonim
et, se oblita deam, tundeat pectora palmis.*) (Pontano lines 68–72)

Since in both cases the metamorphosis is a botanical one – and it is a metamorphosis into a water-loving plant such as citrus fruit, no less – it is entirely appropriate that water should be fundamental to the beloved’s life. Just as in Pontano the transformed Adonis, now a tree, draws its first botanical nourishment from his lover’s tears, so in Basile the prince’s tears are one with the water he must give to the citron fairy so that she may live.

Clear water is accompanied in “The Three Citrons” by two other life-giving fluids, blood and milk, the colours of which feature prominently in the narrative and symbolic development of the tale. Basile’s red blood

and white milk, particularly in the form of ricotta, may also be better understood through a side-by-side reading of “The Three Citrons” and Pontano’s *De hortis Hesperidum*. Like Calvino’s “The Three Pomegranates” and other versions of the fairy tale classified as ATU 408, Basile’s “The Three Citrons” begins with the hero’s desire for a spouse of a certain colouring – in this instance, red as the prince’s own blood, and white as the ricotta cheese he is slicing when he distractedly cuts his finger. This accident points to his desire for the specific woman as being akin to his hunger for a particular food:

Wanting to cut a ricotta cheese in half, while noticing some jackdaws flying by, the prince accidentally cut into his finger, so that two drops of blood, after falling on top of the ricotta, blended into a colour so beautiful and graceful that ... he got the fancy to find a woman just as white and red as was, precisely, that ricotta stained with his own blood.

(Volenzo lo prencepe tagliare na ricotta pe miezo, mentre teneva mente a le ciavole che passavano se fece disgraziatamente no ‘ntacco a lo ditto, tale che, cadendo duie stizze de sango ‘ncoppa a la ricotta, fecero na mesca de colore cossì bello e grazioso che ... le venne capriccio de trovare na femmena cossì ianca e rossa comme era apunto chella ricotta tenta da lo sango suoio.) (“Li tre cetra” 467)

The colours red and white, along with the black represented in Basile by the distracting flight of jackdaws, are prevalent ones in fairy tales. It is noteworthy that this desire for a woman with a red and white colouring, made famous by the Grimm brothers’ classic “Snow White,” first occurs in fairy tales in the *Pentameron*. Although in the Grimms’ more famous “Snow White” the subject of desire is not a man who wants a wife but a woman who wants a daughter, the oldest known version of this motif outside of fairy tales, Chrétien de Troyes’ twelfth-century *Perceval, le Conte du Graal* (*Perceval, the Story of the Grail*, whose protagonist, Perceval, sees three drops of wounded goose blood on the snow and is reminded of his beloved Blancheflor’s white and red complexion) involves romantic love; similar to Perceval’s experience is also that of the protagonist of Basile’s “The Crow,” another *Pentameron* tale – the white is a slab of marble, and the red is the blood of a dead crow lying on it.

Given the centrality of romantic love in “The Three Citrons,” it is not surprising that the goddess Venus should be personally involved in the fairy’s complexion. If love personified had been the one to punish the

prince's initial refusal to marry, by making him obsess over a white-and-red girl ("Li tre cetra" 467), so it is the goddess of love who gives the beloved fairy her desirable, even appetizing, colouring – one that, like love itself, is potentially harmful to the lover: "over those lips, Venus and her temple had passed, colouring the rose so that it might prick with its thorns a thousand souls in love" (a chelle lavra n'era passata Vennere co lo tempio suio, danno colore a la rosa pe pognere co le spine mill'arme 'nnamorate; "Li tre cetra" 471). According to Benedetto Croce, the eminent literary critic and philosopher responsible for the first translation of Basile's work from Neapolitan into Italian in 1925, and for Basile's related induction into the Italian literary canon, the fairy's Venus-given red lips are linked in Basile's tale to the colour of menstrual blood – indeed, to Venus's own menstrual blood. The Neapolitan *tempio* should therefore be translated, Croce argues, not as "temple" but as "tempo," meaning "period, menstruation" (Basile, "I tre cedri" 198). Whether or not menstrual blood is actually referred to in the context of Venus's appearance, the colour red and its most symbolic instance, blood, are undoubtedly central to "The Three Citrons." Indeed, the narrative motor of the tale is the desire of the king's son for a woman white as ricotta and red as blood – as *his own* blood, one might add, hence the note of narcissism in this wish. This red and white colouring may have sexual implications, for lips, cheeks, and genitalia are redder than the rest of the fairy's skin (Picone 313). The colouring may also have been dictated by literary genre conventions because in fairy tales "individual figures are physically set off from each other by sharp outlines and pure colors," with red "the least subtle of all colors" (Lüthi 24, 28). In Basile's tale red is indeed the colour of blood, but red is also, less dramatically, the colour of strawberries (another fruit that abounds in Campania) and of Southern Italian cured meats; given the involvement of a sharp knife, after all, the violent implications of blood need to be kept at bay.

Citrus fruit, however, is not red for Pontano and Basile at least, since blood oranges were not grown in Europe until the eighteenth century. Hence the evocation in "The Three Citrons" of another red fruit, strawberries, the bright colour of which is set off by milky whiteness. The first of the fairies to emerge from the citrons is described as "white as creamy milk and as red as a bunch of strawberries" (ianca commo a latte e natte rossa commo a fraola a schiocca; "Li tre cetra" 470). Red also refers to a variety of Southern Italian cold cuts, whose redness is accentuated by the background whiteness of fresh cheese: "and in his hands he had a girl tender and white like *giuncata* cheese, with a streak of red that

looked like an Abruzzo ham or a Nola salami” (e ecco le resta ‘mano na figliola tennera e ianca commo a ghioncata, co na ‘ntrafilata de russo che pareva no presutto d’Abruzzo o na sopressata de Nola; “Li tre cetra” 471). *Ghioncata*, or in standard Italian *giuncata*, is a fresh cheese typical of southern Italy, Nola is a town near Naples, and Abruzzo is the Italian region just northeast of Campania. In addition to recalling the redness of the prince’s hungry desire, a colour absent from the citrus fruit itself, the comparison of the fairy’s complexion with local fresh cheese (“ghioncata”), ham (“presutto”), and salami (“sopressata”) humorously mixes the high register of the red-and-white beauty, embodying the aristocratic and literary ideal of the prince’s initial desire, with the low register of regional, peasant, and greasy foods – once more anchoring the tale to its physical and cultural geography. Basile’s language revels in such contrasts, verbal and chromatic: the king’s son is beside himself because a citron has given birth to great beauty, because “this beautiful cut of a woman came out from the cutting of a fruit” (cossì bello taglio de femmena sguigliata da lo taglio de no frutto; 471); “Are you asleep or awake?” (Duorme o sì scetato? 471), the king’s son asks himself, unable to believe the reality of “what a white thing has come out of a yellow rind! What a sweet paste from the sourness of a citron!” (che cosa ianca è sciuta da na scorza gialla! Che pasta doce da l’agro de no citro! 471).

The colour metaphor of the emergent fairy, however, must shift away from the botanical one if it is to preserve the white and red of the prince’s desire, to show the colours of his hunger. Unlike Calvino’s pomegranates, whose red and white colouring mirrors perfectly that of the girl who emerges from one of them, citrons are green and yellow. These are never flattering colours when used to describe human complexion in the West, but rather indicative of ill health or envy; no one praises sallow or jaundiced skin, much less the greenish tint brought on by the resentful longing for what belongs to someone else. Basile’s chromatic choice, once more, makes better sense when read in the context of Pontano’s own. Ovid’s version of the myth of Adonis described the youth’s metamorphosis into an anemone, its petals as red as Adonis’s blood out of which Venus fashioned the red flower. Pontano’s version features a citrus tree, however, and, for lack of redness, it is the whiteness of its scented blooms that reflects Adonis’s pale skin – “his whiteness into the flower” (in florem candor; line 85) – while the yellow colour of the citrus rind is repeatedly exalted as gold – e.g., “golden forest” (aurea silvis; line 101) and “golden trees” (auriferae arboris; line 116). This chromatic glorification is supported by, and in turn supports, the fact that citrus fruit

are identified in this poem with the mythical *golden* apples. Basile, too, mentions the fairy's gold – “onto her hair Jove had strewn gold, out of which Love had fashioned arrows for piercing hearts” (a li capille suoie ‘nce aveva chiuoppeto l’oro Giove, de lo quale faceva Ammore le saiette pe spertosare li core; 471) – and the whiteness of a desirable complexion pervades the entire tale: the first fairy is “as white as milk” (ianca como a latte; 470); and the third, “as tender and white as *giuncata* cheese” (tennera e ianca commo a ghioncata; 471), sporting “a whiteness above all whiteness” (ianchezza fore de li fore; 471), in part because “on that breast, Juno had squeezed her tits” (a chillo pietto ‘nce aveva spremmu-to le zizze Iunone; 471). The encounter with the dark-skinned servant of course offers more opportunities still to draw attention to the fairy's whiteness: after the servant kills her, the fairy becomes a “white dove” (ianca palomma; 474) and is compared to “a tub of milk” (na tinella de latte; 474), the “royal paper” (la carta riale; 474), and “a freshly white-washed house” (chella casa ianchiata de frisco; 474).

The colours of personal desire become, in part thanks to the metaphor of desire as a form of hunger, the colours of local foodstuff; the fruit of one's beloved land turns out to be the fruit of love itself; and the descriptions of physical transformation read as the words of poetic immortality. For Giambattista Basile's fairy tale in Neapolitan, “Li tre cetra” (a tale doubly at risk of cultural marginalization because of its genre and because of its language), Giovanni Pontano's distinguished Latin verse (modelled on classical authors such as Virgil and Ovid) provided a modern literary example of citrus metamorphosis and an illustrious precedent. Canepa notes that “one of the most striking aspects of Basile's collection is its impassioned, and often subversive, engagement with literary tradition, especially in the form of Renaissance classicism” (“From the Baroque to the Postmodern” 265). Pontano and Basile both write of amorous loss, sexual desire, and physical beauty – of the beloved and of one's homeland, Campania, at once. This emphasis on geography and the overabundance of figurative language in Basile's story are some of the thematic and stylistic ways in which “The Three Citrons” differs from, and invites us to expand our notion of, the genre of traditional fairy tales. At the same time, citrons in this tale mark the place, characteristic of Basile's collection as a whole and perhaps of the literary fairy tale generally, where folklore meets high culture, where oral tradition blends with literary genealogy, and where the most realistic of realism and the most fantastic of fictions converge in a single text. This is relevant to the genre of fairy tale as a whole given that Basile's collection, in a critic's

words, “produced a literary genre ... The *Cunto* stabilized a formula that became a current in the European tale. Its literary value depends in part on its intertextuality and pan-culturalism (it assimilates local traditions that are very diverse); on its flexibility (it adapts to circumstances that vary a great deal); on its order (it permits an identification with a register [repertoire of characters and motifs]) that is part of a European heritage and consents to have it used” (Rak, cited in Zipes 66).

By focusing our interpretive attention on Basile’s choice of citrus fruit in his narrative, we can see how, for this author, a reliance on Pontano’s citrus model proved useful to the project of attributing literary dignity to the popular genre of fairy tales and to the peculiar Neapolitan language in which he told them. Basile accentuated the distance of this language from popular speech through the abundant and complex vocabulary, rhetorical devices, and syntax that we have come to regard as typical of baroque taste. Basile’s citrons are sensuous like Pontano’s and like the prose that describes them. Like Basile’s language, his citrons are firmly grounded in the land where their author made his home, the same land where Pontano had made his. The citrons may well originate in the faraway Island of the Ogresses and may therefore require a long transoceanic voyage to be procured, but it is only once they are back on Campanian soil – the land of the Hesperides and perhaps the land of Venus herself – and after they have been quenched by Campanian water that they acquire the power to change their greenness into gold, their bitter aftertaste into a sweet flavour, and their hard rind into the soft flesh of the longed-for, red-and-white wife.

CHAPTER 3



The Fruit of the Womb: Ferrari's Maternal Images of Citrus

Pregnancy and Metamorphosis in Botany and Literature

In 1877 the American botanist George Thurber received a strange specimen from the editor of the *Bulletin of the Torrey Botanical Club*, the publication of the oldest botanical society in America. The editor requested that Thurber write about this specimen should he find it “sufficiently unusual.” Thurber clearly did. The specimen he had received was an orange that, upon being peeled and opened up for eating, was found to contain another, smaller orange within itself: “This, if not the rarest of phenomena, is certainly an interesting one,” the scientist concluded (Thurber 165). In his contribution simply and aptly titled “An Orange within an Orange,” Thurber, before going on to describe this and other types of unusual citrus fruit, remarks that “the genus *Citrus* appears to have a remarkable tendency to produce abnormal forms, and probably affords writers on vegetable teratology more illustrations than almost any other. Its leaves, flowers, and fruit sport in various ways, and even its seeds sometimes contain several extra embryos. Several of the unusual forms of the fruit in oranges, lemons, citrons, etc. are continued in cultivation, on account of their curious or ornamental character” (165).

Teratology is the study of monsters, and vegetable teratology figures prominently in this chapter, especially as its unique object relates to sexuality and its representations. In the decades leading up to Linnaeus and

culminating with his work in the 1700s the scientization of botany coincided with the sexualization of plants. This coincidence was such that botanical taxonomy reflected the sexual hierarchy prevalent in Europe at the time, with the “male” parts of plants being given greater taxonomic importance than the “female” parts.¹ Seventeenth-century literature in Italy shared with science a fascination with monsters and with marvels of nature and gave free rein to this fascination in its printed pages. The field of vegetable teratology relies on the analogy between human and vegetable reproduction, as Thurber’s use of the zoomorphic term *embryo* makes clear; although the word *embryo* was not adopted by botanical science until the eighteenth century, the word *fetus* had been used to refer to plants as early as the sixteenth century, and plants have been described with zoomorphic terms since antiquity. As a historian of science explains, “the zoomorphic metaphor *embryo* is very impressive in its modern use and even after two thousand years we talk about ‘embryo rescue’ or ‘embryonic competence’ in plant tissue culture and botany” (Ingensiep 327).

The “Fingered Orange” described by Thurber in this same essay is reminiscent of the kind of citron sometimes found in U.S. markets under the name of Buddha’s Hand. Although this fingered citrus fruit is certainly not unheard of, it remains quite unusual, especially in the West. The oranges containing other oranges that, according to Thurber, are so common in the Canary Islands as to have a proper name – *pregnadoes* (pregnant; Thurber 166) – are not so different, however, from what we know well and love today as navel oranges. Navel oranges began to be produced in the United States in the late nineteenth century, that is, shortly after the publication of Thurber’s article. These fruits that are now so common on supermarket shelves were, in Thurber’s eyes, still an odd novelty and “sufficiently unusual” to warrant a scientific contribution from a specialist. At a loss for contemporary sources for his explanation of the specimen, Thurber turned to the lavishly illustrated, seventeenth-century botanical treatise on citrus fruit by a Jesuit priest from Siena, a man who was also a professor of Hebrew and rhetoric at the Collegio Romano, as well as a horticultural adviser to the Barberini papal family. His name was Giovanni Battista Ferrari (1584–1655), and he had published another volume in 1632, also written in Latin, called *De florum cultura* (On the cultivation of flowers), an extensive and beautifully illustrated book on gardening and flowers that was inspired by the author’s experience in the Barberini family’s Roman gardens. (Interestingly, the Italian translation of Ferrari’s *De florum cultura*, published after Galileo Galilei’s 1633 trial, expunged all references to the

Accademia dei Lincei [Academy of the Lynx Eyed] because this group of scientists was dangerously associated with Galileo.)

Titled *Hesperides, sive de malorum aureorum cultura et usu* (Hesperides, or on the cultivation and use of the golden apples) and published in 1646, ten years after the second volume of Giovan Battista Basile's 1636 baroque collection of literary fairy tales, Ferrari's book was written in an ornate classicizing Latin, for Latin was the language of science then, much like English is now, and has been described as "among the most beautiful artefacts ever to come out of a typographer's workshop" (Caruso 103). (This same title, *Hesperides*, was also chosen in 1708–14 by the German botanist Johann Christoph Volkamer for his celebrated two-volume work, known as the *Nuremberg Hesperides*; heavily influenced by Ferrari's own *Hesperides*, Volkamer's book was written in German but features numerous illustrations of Northern Italian gardens. It is also in honour of Ferrari's book that Samuel Tolkowsky titled his 1938 monumental history of citrus fruit *Hesperides: A History of the Culture and Use of Citrus Fruit*.) Ferrari's *Hesperides* is regarded as the first comprehensive scholarly treatise on citrus fruit, as well as the most exhaustive book on any single family of plants for that time. The work was produced in collaboration with the well-known and learned collector Cassiano dal Pozzo, and although Cassiano's name does not formally appear in the book, he seems to have been the source of a great deal of the information contained therein. He also provided the funds to finance publication ("The contract makes it clear that Cassiano was responsible for supplying the artist's plates for the allegorical illustrations, as well as for arranging the financing of the book as a whole"; Freedberg, "Ferrari and the Pregnant Lemons of Pietrasanta" 45). Ferrari's book has never been translated into Italian, as far as I have been able to ascertain. It has only been translated into English once, and only partially (the introduction and the section on oranges of Ferrari's Latin original) – and unfortunately, as we will see, often inaccurately.²

Ovid's classical narrative about Myrrha in his *Metamorphoses* (ca. 8 CE) provided some early modern writers with an illustrious literary model for the cultural analogy between the reproductive process of plants and that of women, an analogy that has occasionally made hybrid monsters of both women and plants. Therefore, before turning to the in-depth reading of Ferrari's citrus treatise that is at the heart of this chapter, let me recall Myrrha's ancient story, one that proved crucial to the more narrative portions of Ferrari's volume and perhaps in some ways to its very core. The bond between women and plants, and even specifically that

between human pregnancy and botanical reproduction, is an old one in Western culture. It is memorably displayed in ancient Roman literature and is featured in Ovid's famed *Metamorphoses*, that treasure trove of hybrid creatures and unexpected shape-shifting. In the tenth book of this, his best-known work, the Latin poet tells the tragic story of Myrrha, the legendary character from whom is derived the name of the aromatic myrrh tree. Its resin, consisting of Myrrha's own tears, according to Ovid, has been used for perfume, incense, and medicine; in the West, myrrh is perhaps best known as one of the three gifts brought by the three magi to the Christ-child in the visit remembered at Epiphany.

According to Ovid's narrative, the daughter of the king of Cyprus, Myrrha, is madly in love with her own father, Cinyras. To express the young woman's suicidal despair, Ovid uses a proleptic, botanical simile that compares Myrrha to the tree that she will eventually and quite literally become:

Just as a great tree, smitten by the axe, when all but the last blow has been struck, wavers which way to fall and threatens every side, so her mind, weakened by many blows, leans unsteadily now this way and now that, and falteringly turns in both directions; and no end nor rest for her passion can she find save death. She decides on death. (Ovid 91)

(utque secure
 saucia trabs ingens, ubi plaga novissima restat,
 quo cadat, in dubio est omnique a parte timetur,
 sic animus vario labefactus vulnere nutat
 huc levis atque illuc momentaque sumit utroque,
 nec modus et requies, nisi mors, reperitur amoris.
 mors placet.) (Ovid 90; bk. 10, lines 372–8)

With the help of her aged nurse, who fears that Myrrha will commit suicide if her passion is not slaked, and pretending to be someone else while her mother is away at the harvest festival, Myrrha manages to get into her drowsy father's bed, in the dark, for nine nights in a row and becomes pregnant by him. When Cinyras realizes the identity of his lover, however, he draws his sword, and Myrrha must flee, wandering alone for nine full months. She prays to the gods for delivery from her predicament, wanting to neither live nor die, and is turned in response into a myrrh tree – so that she is in fact neither fully alive nor truly dead. But Myrrha, let us not forget, is at this point nine months pregnant. Having

violated a taboo of penetration by bedding her own father, Myrrha is now herself impenetrable, both from the outside and from the inside: how is she supposed to give birth from a body that has become a hardened trunk?

Though unable, in her vegetable state, to cry for help – “The pregnant tree swells in mid-trunk, the weight within straining on its mother. The birthpangs cannot voice themselves, nor can Lucina be called upon in the words of one in travail.” (*Media gravidus tumet arbore venter./ tendit onus matrem; neque habent sua verba dolores,/ nec Lucina potest parientis voce vocari*; 101; bk. 10, lines 505–7.) – the goddess of labour and delivery, Lucina, does come, as she comes for all women, thus calling attention to Myrrha’s state of transformation and bodily split as a characteristic of every woman in pregnancy and childbirth. As it involves the turning of one body into two, the process of reproduction is itself, for women, a form of metamorphosis, as one of Ovid’s readers rightly points out: “In a sense birth – a transition from one body into another body, and from one body to two – might be viewed as the archetypal form of metamorphosis” (McAuley 136). Ovid then describes the end of Myrrha’s pregnancy, resulting in the successful though unusual birth of her son: “Then the tree cracked open, the bark was rent asunder, and it gave forth its living burden, a wailing baby-boy” (*Arbor agit rimas et fissa cortice vivum reddit onus, vagitque puer*; 101; bk. 10, lines 512–13). This is baby Adonis, whom Venus will love when he grows up into a most handsome young man and whose blood she will eventually turn into a flower – the anemone – upon his violent killing by a wild boar, later on in this same tenth book of the *Metamorphoses*. Renaissance men, as we have seen, starting with Giovanni Gioviano Pontano in 1500, changed Adonis’s metamorphosed identity from a delicate anemone flower into a sturdy citrus tree. Adonis, through his transformation into a citrus tree – like myrrh, a scented tree and one known for its healing properties – becomes entirely his mother’s son.

The story of Myrrha is about the tragic loss of bodily integrity through desire (and, importantly, through a lustful man’s not-quite-believable ignorance of his lover’s identity), a story in which the pregnant woman is transformed – Myrrha pretended to be *someone* else, and now she is *something* else altogether – but the fetus she carries is not. (In fact, rather than a hybrid monster like his mother, this child is irresistibly attractive: to call someone an Adonis is to say he is very handsome.) Only through a violent rending, then, can the human child be freed from the trap

that is the mother's less-than-human, monstrous body, and loosened into the world. Myrrha's story provides a fit prologue for my discussion of baroque representations of botanical, and especially citrus, pregnancy because of the excessive desire at its inception and because of its depiction of pregnancy, and even impregnation, as a process of metamorphosis and hybridization. This striking depiction, as we will see, continued to have a profound influence through the centuries. Indeed, from the example of Ovid's representation of Myrrha, Giovanni Battista Ferrari drew the inspiration for his own myths of botanical reproduction in the citrus treatise for which he is best known, *Hesperides*.

Some of the elements in Ovid's version of Myrrha's story may remind readers of the fairy-tale themes – which were to become popular centuries later in Europe especially – in Apuleius's influential narrative of Cupid and Psyche in his *Golden Ass*, from the second century: an unknown lover who shows up at night in one's bed, and the nefarious consequences of curiosity regarding a disguised lover's true identity, to name but two. Ovid, that master of corporeal changes, exerted a powerful influence on early modern European literature, as we saw in the last chapter, with Venus's transformation of Adonis from human being to plant form in Pontano's *Hesperides*, and Pontano's overall reliance on Ovid's transformational narratives about Adonis and about Daphne. Obviously, Ovid's influence is particularly evident in literary fairy tales that involve shifting in and out of human shapes. As one critic puts it, "Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is still to this day an important reference point for narratives involving metamorphoses, since the epic poem provides an important standard and initial starting point, against which to view all writings written subsequently that feature corporeal transformations of the body" (Gallagher 11).

In Ovid's Latin poem, as in Basile's Neapolitan *The Tale of Tales*, for example – the seventeenth-century collection of literary fairy tales discussed in the previous chapter – plants and women are closely connected to each other, especially through sex and pregnancy. In "The Three Citrons," as we have seen, the title fruit are "pregnant," as it were, with as many beautiful fairies, magical beings that the protagonist brings into the world by cutting into each citrus fruit, as in a caesarian section of sorts. Upon their "birth" from the gift fruit, the three fairies must be quickly watered, like citron plants, in order to stay alive. The third fairy, the sole survivor of the dangerous birthing process, becomes once more a citron upon her violent death and is born again through

the cutting and watering of the fruit of the plant that grows out of her mangled remains.

Italo Calvino, in his famed introduction to Italian fairy tales in general and to his 1956 collection in particular, beautifully describes “the unitary substance of all, men, beasts, plants, things, the infinite possibility of metamorphosis of what exists” (la sostanza unitaria del tutto, uomini, bestie, piante, cose, l’infinita possibilità di metamorfosi di ciò che esiste; *Sulla fiaba* 19–20). Throughout Basile’s collection this “unitary substance of all” appears central to many of the tales, with one memorable example found in this author’s representation of the process of impregnation. Impregnation is regularly compared to the horticultural process of grafting, a technique that is used for the reproduction of certain plants such as grapes and citrus, and that is crucial to the cultivation of oranges especially. Thus, for example, in Giambattista Marino’s baroque masterpiece, *Adone* (*Adonis*, 1623, known as the longest poem in Italian literature), we read about the grafting of citrus trees that was so popular during the baroque age: “Grapes are born from the sorb tree and the golden citron is adopted by the purple orange tree” (Nasce l’uva dal sorbo ed adottato / dal’arancio purpureo è il cedro aurato; 207). Some plants do not do well when grown from seed, but when a branch of a new plant is grafted into the rootstock of a different one, the new plant thrives: “Citrus has always seemed to welcome grafting,” Attlee explains, “and both ornamental and commercially cultivated trees are generally made up of two parts that have been grafted together. In most cases the upper tree, or scion, is one species of citrus and the lower trunk and roots, known as the rootstock, is another, chosen for its hardiness and resistance to disease ... The two parts are grafted by inserting a bud and a sliver of bark from the branch of the fruit-bearing tree into a T-shaped cut in the trunk of the seedling used as rootstock. The two are then bound tightly together and left in peace to heal their wounds and find a common purpose” (Attlee 24). The Neapolitan verb that Basile uses for this horticultural process is *’nzertare*, etymologically related to the English *insert*. Through an implicit sexual act Basile’s male characters graft children onto women, in stories such as “Penta with the Chopped-Off Hands” (“La Penta mano-mozza”) – “He took Penta as a wife and on the first night he grafted her with a male child” (se pigliaie Penta per moglie e la primma note la ‘nzertaie a figlio mascolo; *Il Pentamerone* 223) – and “The Snake” (“Lo serpe”), in which a childless peasant woman who longs for a child complains that her husband, “although he is a gardener, is unable to perform a



Giorgione, *Double Portrait*, 1502. Reproduced by permission
of classicpaintings / Alamy Stock Photo.



Caravaggio, *Boy Peeling Fruit*, 1592.

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aut cohiberi posse videbatur, nisi factio ipsa discens in se diuisa primum fomenta ac semina discordiarum retardasset. Nam hoc nouum portentum genus & exemplum insolens edidit turbulenti, ut de ijs prius mentis fuit, qui suae coniurationi nomen dederant, quam alij, qui contra palam steterunt. Ita rabie perciti sibi ipsius vim attulerunt, seseq; confoderunt, & in exitum spontaneam coniecerunt. At verò quam innumerabiles ex ijs, qui de vita potius, quam de sententia decedere maluerint

imo super sunt adhuc qui reliquiis tantum incendijs, autum tantum urantur retineant; & nescio quid magis adhuc, cum aperire eloqui non audeant. Horum 4. Carm. 4. illicem pro nota forma suscipit, dum ait:

*Dartu ut ille gausse bipennis
Sagra ferat fronda in Alga,
Per d' arma, per cadit, de ipso
Ducit opes animarum, ferre.*
Sed de his satis ad alia festinamus.

Malus Medica.

EMBLEMA CCVII.



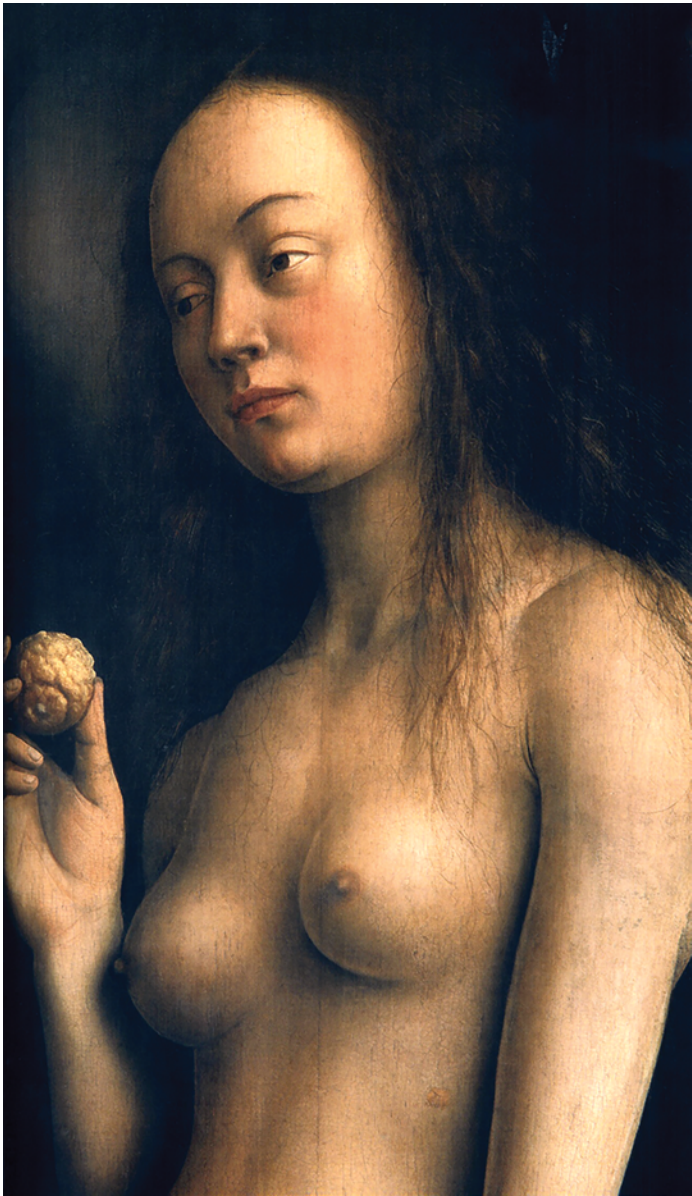
AVREA sunt Veneris poma haec: incundus amor
Indicat, est Gracis sic γλυκύπικρος amor.

COMMENTARI.

I.
Mali Me
dica.

ARBOR haec non admodum magna
est: tamen eius levis & obsequiosus cor

rice virant, & spinulas aliquas non vix
frequenter adunas habent. Toisan d'au



Jan van Eyck, *Ghent Altarpiece*, detail, ca. 1432.
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Andrea Mantegna, *Madonna of Victory*, 1496.

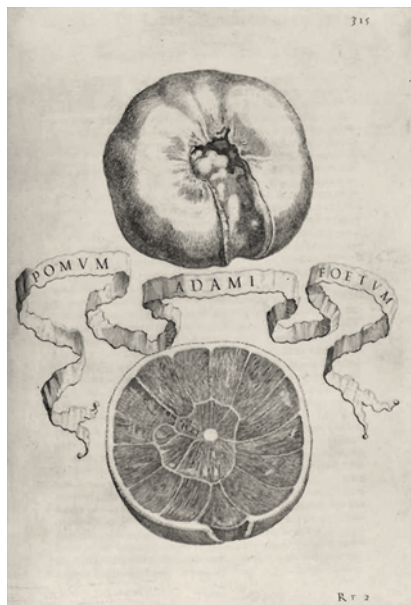
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Joos van Cleve, *Holy Family*, 1512–13. Reproduced by permission of Tomas Abad / Alamy Stock Photo.



Pierre-Nicolas Legrand de Sérant, *The Orange Vendor*, late 1700s.
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(top left)
Pomum Adami foetum,
 in Giovanni Battista Ferrari,
Hesperides sive de malorum aureorum
cultura et usu (Rome: Scheus, 1646).

(top right)
Aliae formae citrati limonis alios includentis,
 in Giovanni Battista Ferrari,
Hesperides sive de malorum aureorum
cultura et usu.

(bottom)
Aurantium foetiferum,
 in Giovanni Battista Ferrari,
Hesperides sive de malorum aureorum
cultura et usu.



*The Metamorphosis of Harmonillus, in Giovanni Battista Ferrari,
Hesperides sive de malorum aureorum cultura et usu.*



*The Metamorphosis of Tiresias, in Giovanni Battista Ferrari,
Hesperides sive de malorum aureorum cultura et usu.*



*The Metamorphosis of Leonilla, in Giovanni Battista Ferrari,
Hesperides sive de malorum aureorum cultura et usu.*

Antonello da Messina, *San Cassiano Altarpiece*, detail, 1475.
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Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera*, 1482.

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Bartolomeo Bimbi, *Arance, Lime, Limoni e Lumie*, detail, 1715.
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Quentin Matsys, *The Money Lender and His Wife*, 1514. Reproduced by
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Jan van Eyck, *Arnolfini Portrait*, 1434. Reprinted from Wikimedia Commons.



Le arance non cadono dal cielo, flyer, 2011. Reproduced by permission of Oltracittà, <http://primaveraromana.wordpress.com>.

graft" (con tutto che sia ortolano, non è da tanto de far no 'nsierto; *Il Pentamerone* 153). In "The Enchanted Doe" ("La cerva fatata") a wandering sage prepares to counsel a childless king about his wife and says, "Now listen to me, if you want to graft her like a pear tree" (Ora siente buono, si la vuoi 'nertare a piro; *Il Pentamerone* 82).

Although citrus in particular is only explicitly compared to women in the very last tale of Basile's *The Tale of Tales*, "The Three Citrons," the analogies of women with other plants, especially similarly aromatic plants also used in the kitchen, reappear throughout the volume. Important examples are "Petrosinella" (literally "the parsley girl"), the earliest known version of "Rapunzel," featuring a pregnant woman's desire for an ogress's parsley; and, most explicitly, "The Myrtle" ("La mortella"). In this latter tale the childless woman at the start of the narrative so desperately wants a child that she exclaims, "Oh God, if only I could give birth to something in this world, and I wouldn't care if it were a branch of myrtle" (O dio, partoresse quarcosa a lo munno, e non me curarria che fosse frasca de mortella!; *Il Pentamerone* 21). Sure enough, the woman does give birth to a myrtle plant – the plant sacred to Venus and often appearing as an attribute of the goddess of love and sex in mythology and iconography. Not surprisingly, this myrtle, of woman born, is a magical plant out of which, after the king's son buys it, a beautiful fairy regularly emerges and becomes first the prince's lover and eventually his wife. The myrtle plant too, like the citron in "The Three Citrons," is reborn after the fairy is mangled by jealous female rivals. Young women who emerge from plants or fruit, such as those in Basile's "The Three Citrons" and "The Myrtle," reappear in later Italian fairy tales. Examples include Italo Calvino's "Rosmarina" (the eponymous protagonist's name is the feminine inflection of the word for rosemary) and "The Apple Girl" ("La ragazza mela"), both included in Calvino's classic 1956 collection *Italian Folktales* (*Fiabe italiane*).³

Baroque literature – and, as we will see shortly, baroque science too – revels in the transformations of one creature into a different one, in the flowing of beings from one natural kingdom to another, in the uncertainties and similarities of forms that lead to sameness across differences – or, to cite Calvino again, in "the unitary substance of all." A special attention to oranges in these early modern texts about pregnancy gives an enlightening perspective on the issue of forms and deformity, thanks to the unique role played by oranges, among all plants, in matters of hybridity and monstrosity.

Fruit, Women, and Monsters in Early Modern Europe

Oranges, and especially blood oranges, have been likened to the female body, and their peeling compared to the act of undressing before sex, in poems from the twentieth and twenty-first century, such as Michael Meyerhofer's 2008 "A Plea for the Cessation of Fruit Metaphors," Judith Pacht's 2002 "Recipe for S & M Marmalade," and Jacques Prévert's 1951 "Sanguine" (Blood orange). A few centuries earlier the Portuguese poet Luís de Camões (1524?–80), after singing of the luscious orange trees and comparing their fruit to Daphne's golden braids, dwells on "the beauteous lemons, which the whole perfume/The virgin bosom in their form assume" (*Os formosos limões alli cheirando,/Estão virgineas tâtas imitando*; Camões 174–5). A charmed attraction to the similarity between citrus fruit and women's breasts is evident in the visual arts as well. In Joos van Cleve's painting *Holy Family* (1512–13) the infant Jesus is holding an orange in his hand even as he suckles on his mother's breast: does he plan to suck on the orange next, given the similar shape and size of the two half globes, or was it clear to audiences then that he was far too young for oranges? This same artist's later oil on canvas, also titled *Holy Family* (ca. 1520), portrays the infant Jesus playing with Mary's naked, engorged breast while Joseph looks on from the background; half an orange, with a knife resting on it, sits on the sill where Jesus is standing. Mary has clearly been interrupted by a hungry Jesus, right before she finished eating the orange she had cut into and started preparing; almost half of the orange is missing from the scene, presumably having been already eaten, and the remaining half looks a lot like Mary's own full breast. Painted over two centuries later as a secular rather than a sacred picture, *The Orange Vendor* (*La marchande d'oranges*, late 1700s) by Pierre-Nicolas Legrand de Sérant (1758–1829), is a perfect example of the implicit cultural comparison between fruit and breasts. This painting is sometimes described as an allegory of the five senses because of its visual, olfactory, tactile, gustatory, and even aural appeal – the boy hiding behind the pretty vendor holds a flute in his hand. At its centre a young and buxom, topless seller is peddling oranges that very closely resemble her own breasts, breasts that are conveniently exposed just behind the proffered fruit. The oranges mirror the shape and size of their seller's breasts down to her stem-like nipples. Other paintings by the same title – Laurent Guyot's from 1786, for example, and Pierre Auguste Renoir's from 1890 – also emphasize to varying degrees the similarity between the oranges being sold and the shape of the seller's own breasts, as if the

sheer proximity of a young woman holding a basket of oranges should invite a mammary mirroring process.⁴

Oranges and women have been equated in a variety of texts, and not just artistic or literary ones. In Italian, as I mentioned while discussing Basile's "The Three Citrons," words for fruit trees are masculine, with the corresponding words for the fruit they bear usually expressed in the grammatically feminine gender; thus an apple tree is *un melo*, and an apple is *una mela*; an orange tree is *un arancio*, and an orange is *un'arancia*. Prominent exceptions to this rule include the lemon – *un limone* refers to both the tree and the fruit – and the fig – *il fico*, which is also masculine for both tree and fruit; despite its vulgarity, the use of the word *fica* (the grammatically feminine version of "fig") to refer to female genitals is common and old, going back to the ancient Greece of Aristophanes's comedies, recurring through the history of Italian literature, and stressing perhaps more than any other the sexualized gendering of fruit. (Through the linguistic process of synecdoche, the word *fica* has also come to mean a sexually attractive woman.)⁵ Capitalizing on this time-tested connection between women and oranges, a Sicilian consortium of citrus producers in 2005 has cleverly named its product Arancia Rosaria. Rosaria is a woman's first name derived from the Catholic devotion to our Lady of the Rosary and is especially popular in Sicily. The consortium has sponsored a number of thirty-second commercials in which the product being advertised, namely fresh oranges from Sicily, is compared to a woman, and a Sicilian woman in particular, thanks also to the name Rosaria. Although these oranges are occasionally associated with a mother-centred family – as in the 2011 commercial featuring the morning of an Italian family and the slogan "More vitamins, more well-being, more flavour, more energy, more freshness (Più vitamine, più benessere, più gusto, più energia, più freschezza) – they are elsewhere explicitly tied to the sexy female body, as shapely and desirable as a juicy and shiny orange. In the commercial titled "Irresistibile Rosaria" the woman on the screen is the Sicilian actress Rosaria Russo (1981–), who plays, so to speak, herself: she is the beautiful Sicilian object of desire named Rosaria, who, upon languidly getting out of bed scantily clad, sensuously rubs a whole fresh orange all over her neck and bosom while standing in front of a mirror and immediately thereafter goes outside to meet a handsome orange vendor. After seeing the woman (who modestly but not very effectively wraps herself in a traditionally Sicilian-looking black shawl), the man takes an orange – presumably the very one that Rosaria had previously rubbed all over herself – and inhales its (or perhaps *her*) scent. Not

for nothing, the final line of the song that plays in the background entreats the viewers to entertain a personal relationship with the orange, invitingly stating, “The red orange: Call her by name!” (*L’arancia rossa: Chiamala per nome!*).⁶

The frequent analogy between women and fruit in literature, art, and popular culture sexualizes both and, in certain texts, even goes so far as to turn both fruit and women into monsters by portraying them as they morph into one another and turn into hybrids. This bond between women and fruit is an old one in the West, one that is even older than some of the above-quoted examples suggest. The Bible sometimes describes children as “the fruit of the womb,” as in Psalm 127: “The fruit of the womb is a reward.” The best-known biblical connection between fruit and sex is found in the eating of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. The object of temptation may have been an apple, a fig, a quince, or a small sour orange – the citrus fruit known as “Adam’s apple” that I described in an earlier chapter, and to which Ferrari himself, in his *Hesperides*, devotes several pages and illustrations, including a pregnant version of it: “we recognize that it was one of the golden fruits of this same kind that was the fruit both of Adam and of Paradise” (*quod & nos inter aureos eiusmodi fructus & Adami & Paradisi pomum agnoscimus*; Ferrari 39). Whatever Eden’s actual fruit might have been, there is a strong sense that in the popular imagination Eve’s fruit, the one she enticingly proffered Adam, who could not offer effective resistance to its temptation, was in fact Eve herself. The opposite fruit to the one that caused the Fall, in Christian Scriptures, is an even vaguer one botanically, the very fruit that brought redemption: the fruit of Mary of Nazareth’s womb.⁷ Thus Christ is remembered as a fruit – as the product of a “fertile” womb, much like an orange is the product of a fertile tree – every time a Hail Mary is recited, with words uttered in the Visitation episode from the Gospel of Luke: “Blessed are you among women,” Elizabeth tells Mary when the two pregnant women greet each other, “and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus” (Luke 1:42).

In early modern Italian culture there are many instances of the sexualization of fruit, both verbal and visual. We can see a striking example of the latter, for example, in the Loggia of Psyche at the Villa Farnesina in Rome, a Renaissance villa along the Tiber River that is ensconced in a lush garden containing a large variety of citrus fruit. In its frescoed botanical festoon, painted by Giovanni da Udine in 1518 and telling the proto-fairy tale of Cupid and Psyche, we see an elongated, phallic gourd penetrating a split-open fig. The sexual imagery is obvious and has been

regularly noted; art historian John Varriano describes the frescoes at Villa Farnesina as being among “the first painted still lifes to carry an erotic charge” (“Fruits and Vegetables as Sexual Metaphor” 8).⁸ Not coincidentally, during this same historical period the connection between fruit and pregnancy, and specifically pregnancy and cucurbits (for the representation of which Da Udine’s loggia is notable, especially in terms of botanical accuracy and variety), was so close as to seep into legal language; the related Latin words *cucurbitare* and *cucurbitatio*, words originating in the Latin names for the botanical family that includes zucchini, cucumbers, pumpkins, and melons, are defined in a Latin dictionary from 1678 as describing the illicit impregnation of women: “To pollute through adultery another man’s wife: especially about a vassal, who pollutes through adultery his master’s wife and inflates her womb like a pumpkin, namely impregnates her” (*Uxorem alterius adulterio polluere: proprie de vassallo, qui domini uxorem adulterio polluit & eius ventrem instar cucurbita inflat, i. impraegnare*; Ducange 2: 1208).

Of all plants, and *pace* Ovid who probably did not know much about them and for that reason did not include them in his *Metamorphoses*, citrus fruits are especially suitable for a transformation into the shape of a human body. Tommaso Campanella, as we have seen, has described lemons and citrons shaped “like a penis with the foreskin and testicles; others exactly like a vulva” (Campanella 189). A poet contemporary to Campanella, Basile, and Ferrari, the Neapolitan Giambattista Marino (1569–1625) – whose *Adonis*, dedicated to Myrrha’s son, is generally regarded as the highest example of baroque poetry in Italy – also notes this mimetic propensity in citrus fruit in his poetic idyll titled *Proserpina* (ca. 1620), the Roman name of the Greek Persephone. As the eponymous protagonist walks through a citrus orchard, she sees, hanging from the branches,

obscene oranges, large lemons and huge citrons; I could not say through what hidden quality or unknown artifice of strange agriculture, or through what playful work or frisky whim of Nature, they display the prodigious shapes of large male organs, and cause among onlookers the pleasure of taste and the shame of sight.

(aranci osceni,
Grossi limoni, e smisurati cedri,
Non saprei dir per quale
Virtute occulta, et artificio ignoto
Di strania agricoltura,

O per qual di Natura
 Giocosa industria, e capriccioso scherzo,
 Figurando in se stessi
 Di gran membra virili
 Prodigiose forme,
 Fanno con provocar ne' riguardanti
 Il diletto del gusto, onta ala vista.) (Marino, *La Sampogna* 150)

Marino's citrus fruit, meant to make an impression on a young woman, Proserpina, and not on a male botanist, takes on distinctly male forms, however prodigious, which of course would not work if the point were to answer the questions raised by teratology by insisting on the fruit's pregnancy. Ferrari, as we will see in the next section, does not dwell on citrus fruits that are male shaped but on those that imitate the female form.

In Giambattista Marino's baroque work, Proserpina walks in marvel among citrons shaped like male sexual organs. The metamorphosis of citrons takes place, as well, in a sonnet by the Neapolitan poet Giacomo Lubrano (1619–93), one of Marino's literary followers. Lubrano was, like Ferrari, a Jesuit priest and did not emphasize, like Marino did, the lewd forms assumed by citrus fruit. But in his poem "Fantastic Citrons Variouslly Represented in Reggio's Gardens" ("Cedri fantastici variamente figurati negli orti reggiani") Lubrano waxes eloquent about citron trees and fruit that turn, Proteus-like, into warriors against a personified Autumn; in so doing, these citrons become monsters with tiger paws and bear muzzles and, if bitten into, shift their shape into that of venomous snakes – referring to the bitterness of their rind.

Rural frenzies, flowery dreams, scented vegetable deliria, whims of gardens, fronded Proteuses, and citrons crazed with a delightful madness, as if they were Cadmus's plants they are bravely armed for a wooded joust against the bellicose Autumn; or, like Pomona's playful lovers, they give birth to false monsters off the ground. You see tigers' paws and bears' muzzles and snake-like monsters, and if you sink your teeth into them, you are almost afraid of touching them and flee their bite. Others, quivering Lemur-like ghosts, have a hideous back tangled with horns, and turn even fear into food and pleasure.

(Rustiche frenesie, sogni fioriti,
 deliri vegetabili odorosi,
 capricci de' giardin, Protei frondosi,

e di ameno furor cedri impazziti,
 quasi piante di Cadmo armano arditi
 a l'Autunno guerrier tornei selvosi;
 o di Pomona adulteri giocosi,
 fan nascere nel suol mostri mentiti.
 Vedi zampe di tigri e ceffi d'orso
 e chimere di serpi, e se l'addenti,
 quasi ne temi il tocco e fuggi il morso.
 Altri in larve di Lemuri frementi
 arruffano di corna orrido il dorso,
 e fan cibo e diletto anco i spaventì.) (Croce, *Lirici marinisti* 461)

Centred on the representation of citrus metamorphosis, Lubrano's sonnet recalls Calvino's tenet about the "unitary substance of all" at the core of fairy tales, as well as the special role played by changeable fruits, such as those produced by citrus trees, in the fascination experienced, during the baroque period especially, with the marvels of organic shape-shifting.

As the previous examples illustrate, the appeal of hybrids and monsters, or even of hybrids *as* monsters ("the step from hybridization to monstrosity is easy," writes the philosopher of science Georges Canguilhem, 30), in Ferrari's book on citrus fruit is part of a general interest in monsters and the marvels of nature that developed and flourished in early modern Europe, with a peak in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Jeffrey Cohen's seminal essay "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," in which monsters are usefully defined as "the harbinger of category crisis" (6) – as they certainly are in Ferrari's treatise – notes that monsters proliferated during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries largely because beliefs that had been held until then as facts were being steadily challenged and even eroded, not least by science and by what was learned in the so-called New Worlds. In early modern Europe, as well as earlier in European history, the study of monsters centred on the examination of their origin. This usually meant the mother's body, where monsters were produced and out of which they issued. In fact, the pregnant body itself – the body of a woman but also, in Ferrari's *Hesperides*, the body of an orange – has been represented as monstrous. Pregnant women both produced monsters and were themselves monsters. Aristotle is sometimes quoted for having included women in the category of monsters, by stating that females were a departure from the (male) norm: "and we should look upon the female state as being as it were a deformity" (Aristotle 461). Feminist theorists have repeatedly taken up the issue of monsters as a

gendered one, particularly in a reproductive context: “woman as a sign of difference is monstrous,” memorably writes feminist critic Rosi Braidotti (*Nomadic Subjects* 226). This bond between human reproduction and the less-than-human monster brings together the representation of pregnancy at the crossroads of botany and literature. Ferrari shared with Basile an undeniable literary and personal fascination with monsters and especially with marvels of nature; the difference between these two, monsters and marvels, is often described in terms of the disgust elicited by the former but not the latter. Neither Basile’s jocose Neapolitan nor Ferrari’s lofty Latin left much literary space for disgust, yet a critical attention to the representation of citrus fruit in their texts affords contemporary readers, despite our very different scientific approach to such questions, the opportunity to share in the sense of marvel that the culture of these authors eagerly embraced.⁹

The Classification of Citrus Monsters in *Hesperides*

When Sam Tolkowsky published in 1938 his voluminous history of citrus fruit, *Hesperides* – the most thorough such study available to this day – he began his preface with a nod to “Giovanni Battista Ferrari, a learned Jesuit priest and botanist of Sienna, [who] published in Rome his monumental treatise entitled *Hesperides sive de Malorum Aureorum Cultura et Usu Libri Quatuor* (Hesperides, or Four Books on the Culture and Use of the Golden Apples).” Tolkowsky writes that he chose the same title as Ferrari’s for his own volume because he “wished to pay a tribute to the labours of his distant predecessor, the first pioneer in the field of citri-cultural history” (vii). Ferrari’s title, in turn, refers to the location of the eleventh of Hercules’ twelve labours, the mythical Garden of the Hesperides. This was the garden of Juno, the Greek Hera, a garden named after the Hesperides sisters who, along with Ladon, the one-hundred-headed dragon who never slept, were in charge of guarding it. The sisters were protecting the trees’ precious fruit, namely the golden apples that gave immortality to those who tasted them. The golden apples were the precious fruit that Hercules was charged with picking and bringing to King Eurystheus, as part of his penance for having murdered his own family in a fit of madness. Ferrari compares Juno’s garden to the Italian gardens that were in vogue during his time, gardens often graced with, and certainly ennobled by, the still-rare presence of precious citrus fruit. As Tolkowsky confirms, “it was the sixteenth and part of the seventeenth centuries – the age of maturity of what is generally called the Renaissance

villa – that gave citrus trees, both in theory and practice, their final status as an element of the first importance in the Italian garden” (186). Still in 1726, in D. Paolo Bartolomeo Clarici’s *Istoria e coltura delle piante* (History and culture of plants), we read that a truly beautiful garden must include the three types of citrus fruit, citron, lemon, and orange – without which “it clearly loses its nobility” (decade manifestamente della sua Nobiltà; 593). Clarici lists the various shapes taken by citrus fruit, including “mammella” (breast) and “one hundred other strange shapes, which with the name of Monsters, in their very deformity, they become notable, and desirable, acceptable, and pointed at, with a finger, to curious people” (cent’altre delle più strane figure, che col nome di Mostri, nella loro stessa deformità, si fan riguardevoli, ed ambiti, accetti, e mostrati a ditto a’ curiosi; 593).

The early modern European connection between the golden apples of Greek mythology and the citrus fruit so beloved in contemporary times, which began with Pontano’s long Latin poem *De hortis Hesperidum*, is dramatically visible in the frontispiece engraving of Ferrari’s volume. Etched from a design by baroque master Pietro da Cortona (1644), the frontispiece shows a massive Hercules with three golden apples in his hand, the dragon at his feet, one of the sisters giving him a laurel wreath, and the others in the background. Ferrari quips about the sisters’ role in guarding the golden fruit: “Here I wonder about Queen Juno’s lack of good sense in entrusting gold to women – which is like entrusting suet to weasels, or sheep to wolves” (Miror hic ego Reginae Iunonis improvidam prudentiam, ut aurum foeminis, nempe sebum mustelis, ovem lupis commiserit; Ferrari 7). Gold is irresistible to women, Ferrari implies, as also evidenced by Atalanta’s own loss to Hippomenes in their mythic foot race because the young woman could not resist stopping to pick up the golden apples that her suitor had tossed behind himself – in the mythological story summarized earlier in this book. Although the number of the Hesperides sisters varies in ancient texts, Ferrari, like Hesiod’s *Theogony* before him, recognizes three of them, and the book is therefore divided into three parts preceded by an introduction: the introduction describes citrus lore in archaeological, etymological, mythological, and numismatic terms; the first part focuses on citrons, the oldest of all citrus fruit, protected by the first of the Hesperides sisters to be recognized by Ferrari, Aegle; the second part focuses on lemons, protected by another of the Hesperides sisters, Arethusa; and the third part is dedicated to oranges, protected by the last Hesperides sister, Hespertusa. Along with the three sisters, Ferrari accepted the traditional division of citrus fruit into

three genera, which he referred to as *Malum citreum* (citrons), *Malum limonium* (lemons), and *Malum aurantium* (oranges). Ferrari's classification "was never entirely superseded by Linnaeus (whose classification of citrus fruit has never won complete approval)," and in fact "in the field of citrus fruit taxonomic confusion still reigns" (Freedberg, "Ferrari on the Classification of Oranges and Lemons" 291). Ferrari's "chief contribution" to botanical science, furthermore, was to make sure "that all species, however complex, could be made to fit into these groups" (Freedberg, "Ferrari and the Pregnant Lemons of Pietrasanta" 43).¹⁰

The monstrous citrus specimens included in Ferrari's *Hesperides*, often described as pregnant, both inspire and challenge the author of this treatise in his efforts to give order to a clearly rebellious plant genus. Ferrari managed to include hybrid and teratological specimens in his otherwise traditional classification and even appears to have granted special importance to their shape and origin. His alacrity has been aptly described as "an attempt to naturalize the unnatural" (Freedberg, "Ferrari on the Classification of Oranges and Lemons" 297). Ferrari's scientific and personal curiosity with respect to botanical monsters contrasts with the horror elicited in him and others by human and animal monsters. He assumes that his readers share this curiosity and this horror when he writes of our human predilection for fruit monsters, and the fearful revulsion we experience in the presence of other monstrous creatures: "Although we are usually horrified by failed births and monsters in the majority of living things, we love them in fruit" (*Abortus et monstra in animantibus plerunque horremus, amamus in pomis*; 413) – the Latin word *abortus* that Ferrari uses means both "abortion" and "miscarriage," as well as a failed birth generally, and by extension a monster. Whether or not this love of monstrous and imperfect fruit is indeed a shared one, Ferrari's enthusiasm for it is evident in the high proportion of deformed fruit that is represented in the illustrations of his *Hesperides* and in the drawings collected for that purpose – monstrous fruit that Ferrari painstakingly includes as objects of his classification rather than excluding them as aberrations. Poor Ferrari, alas, never learned that the primary reason for the deformities typical of citrus fruit, the deformities that gave him the hardest time in his classificatory efforts, and that sometimes give citrus a digitated, sexual, or pregnant shape, is the infestation of *Aceria sheldoni*, commonly known as the citrus bud mite. *Aceria sheldoni* is a worldwide pest in the production of citrus that, by living and feeding in the buds, blossoms, and flowers of the host, causes malformations in its leaves, flowers, and – most dramatically – fruit. Significantly, this pest is called in

Italian *acaro delle meraviglie* (mite of marvels) precisely because of the visually striking shapes it produces in the affected citrus. Although lemons are especially affected by this tiny mite, all citrus fruit is susceptible to its distorting damage. The citrus bud mite, unfortunately for Ferrari, was only discovered in the 1930s. (Although this mite is frequently responsible for finger-like distortions in citrus fruit, digitated citrons are also produced genetically, as in the case of a highly scented citron native to Japan and China that is prized for its shape and known commonly as Buddha's hand, or scientifically as *Citrus medica* var. *sarcodactylis*.) What Ferrari in his text could not prove scientifically, however, given his ignorance of *Aceria sheldoni*, he made up for in literary invention, with seamless transitions between scientific observation and mythological creation, between the genres that the author would call philosophy on the one hand and poetry on the other; Ferrari worked, after all, not only as a botanist but also as professor of rhetoric at the Collegio Romano.

Like Basile did a few years before him, Ferrari emphasizes metamorphosis, both human and botanical, and displays in his work a fascination with the pregnant hybrid: with a body, that is, where the boundaries between self and other (and, in Ferrari's texts, also the boundaries between human and plant) are confused. Thus, just like Basile represented pregnant women who were closely connected with plants – by being impregnated as if they were plants, through a metaphorical grafting, or by literally bearing and giving birth, more uncannily, to a plant (the fairy tale titled “The Myrtle” being the most eloquent instance of this) – so also Ferrari represents plants that are closely connected with, and regularly compared to, pregnant women. Significantly, the title of Ferrari's book is *Hesperides*, a metonymy indicating the name of both women and plants, that of the three sister nymphs and that of the golden apples that the nymphs were in charge of guarding. This analogy emerges most clearly thanks to the fact that citrus plants, in Ferrari's experience, bear what this author calls “fetuses” and sport what looks to him to be a “pregnant” appearance. Ferrari's botanical treatise dabbles in literature, much like Basile's fairy tales dabbled in science.

So also Ferrari's *Hesperides* makes ample use of the metaphor of pregnancy, a trope that imagines fruit as capable of being, like a woman, pregnant. The “*Pomum Adami foetum*” (pregnant Adam's apple) is one such fruit, masculine and feminine at once and also connected to Eden and Eve's irresistible temptation. More at length, Ferrari discusses the “*Limon citratus*,” namely the citrated lemon, so called because it is a lemon that resembles a citron. Ferrari praises this fruit as “the most delicious

and sweetest of all lemons" (*limonum, quotquot sunt, nobilissimum suavisissimumque*; 263) and describes it throughout in terms of the female body, from breasts to uterus – both visible and invisible sexual organs, secondary and primary sexual characteristics: "Its shape ... sometimes is even a breast with a nipple at the tip; or it is round because of other unborn fruit, making its uterus pregnant" (*Forma eidem ... interdum etiam papillato apice mammosa: vel innatis pomis aliis, uterum gravidantibus, rotunda*; 263). Ferrari's description verbally feminizes the lemon, first of all by comparing its most obvious shape to that of a woman's breast – as did other writers and artists before and after Ferrari, as we have seen in the previous section – and then by resorting to a view only seen by scientists, the shape of a uterus.

The sexualized, female form of this lemon rather seamlessly, one might even say naturally, leads to a pregnant one, and Ferrari continues his description of the *Limon citratus* by noting that the tree's tendency to produce pregnant fruit is aided by its location: Pietrasanta, in modern-day Tuscany. This city is located near a warm sea, which makes its land so fertile that "it very often gives birth to citrated lemons pregnant with other lemons" (*citratos limones limonibus aliis gravidos frequentius parit*; Ferrari 263). The fertility of the land produces the fertility of its fruit. If you cut into one of these lemons from Pietrasanta, you find another lemon inside, and sometimes yet a third lemon is found inside the second – much like a set of Russian nesting dolls. As if that were not enough:

If you cut a window through the last lemon a tight brood of little lemons may sometimes be observed. Sometimes, however, the uterus of the outermost fruit splits open spontaneously with multiple cracks and generates other lemons, like enclosed fetuses and united little brothers, that it discharges; nevertheless it does not give birth to them, because it does not let them come out.

(*Quinetiam extimi e pomi fenestrata incisura minutorum nonnunquam limonum congesta pullities introspicitur. Interdum autem suae spontis hiatus multiplici parens exterioris pomi uterus alios limones, tanquam foetus inclusos cohaerentesque fraterculos parturit, quia patefacit: nec tamen parit, quia non excludit.*) (Ferrari 263)

This insistent cutting into ever-deeper layers of the citrated lemon dramatizes the scientist's curiosity, specifically Ferrari's own curious wonder and his passionate desire to penetrate, quite literally, the mysteries

of citrus fruit. In the words of historians of science Daston and Park, “as theorized by medieval and early modern intellectuals, wonder was a cognitive passion, as much about knowing as about feeling” (14). The *Limon citratus* that so impassions Ferrari is a pregnant kind of lemon, one that, because of its own extraordinary fertility, eventually cracks – not unlike Myrrha did when she had to give birth while transformed into a tree trunk; how does one give birth without a birth canal, with a stretchy opening at its end? Frighteningly, however, and unlike Myrrha, who received Lucina’s divine aid, this lemon does not quite manage to give birth.

The citrated lemon is a marvel of nature indeed. Among the names of Ferrari’s citrus, however, the one that most clearly invokes the metaphor of pregnancy, a metaphor that is human, female, and reproductive at once, is the “female, or fetus-bearing orange” (*Aurantium femina sive foetiferum*; 405). Interestingly, the name of this latter orange reads, in the partial English translation by Hawkinson, as the “seeds of the orange,” likely because of this translator’s having mistaken a regular *F* for the so-called long or medial *S*, which looks like a lowercase *F* and was common in early modern printed books at least through the eighteenth century. Hawkinson, then, mistakenly translates *femina* (female, woman) as *semina* (seeds).¹¹ (Less easy to explain is the reason that this translator should have turned *foetiferum*, which literally means “fetus-bearing,” into “the children of the orange.”) The description and illustration of this female orange highlights the connection between the strange shapes that hybridity brings on and the reproductive habits of this plant genus – shapes and habits that are at the heart of Ferrari’s study. The illustration shows four views of this orange: from the top, namely from the stem end, and according to which the fruit looks absolutely normal; from the bottom, where the whorls of the “fetuses” contained within the globe complicate the picture considerably and make the fruit into a monster of sorts; and then two cross sections, one length-wise and the other width-wise, both strange looking because they show the small “oranges” or fetuses within the round, “pregnant” shape of the flesh.

The names with which we call things matter, and the names of the citrus fruit in Ferrari’s *Hesperides* are no exception in their ability to communicate meanings and interpretations beyond the strictly literal ones and to tell us about the cultural background from which they emerged. “Taxonomic systems of the past – particularly those found in natural history, biology, and geology – are now seen to be one of the most important resources for understanding the interconnections of science and

culture,” it has rightly been noted (Browne 593). Thus, when writing about this “Female, or fetus-bearing orange,” Ferrari refers first of all to his earlier explanation concerning pregnant lemons, the *Limon citratus*, in which he had stated that lemons that include one fruit within the other, “pregnant lemons,” are caused by soil that is so exuberantly fertile as to produce the division of each seed into multiple parts. This division is in turn fed by an excess of generative forces and leads to a number of “fetuses,” brought on by what Ferrari interprets as the “lasciviousness” of nature – lascivious because it shows excessive sexual desire and consequent fertility (and Nature, for him as for his contemporaries, is gendered as female, *Natura*). So, also, Ferrari writes:

This orange, like the lemon which includes others within it, imitates as much as it can the fruitfulness of its own tree, and although it is barely pregnant with abortive or premature fruit, it does not give birth to any. Both this orange and the next one, neuter in kind, degenerate into the female form, or into an androgynous one. The fetus-bearing orange is ordinary in size ... but the innermost part sometimes has ten sections, sometimes more ... and the inner parts have four sections held together through a gaping navel – sometimes more, sometimes less; there is a kind of densely, semi-visible offspring which retains its greenness for a fairly long time, while the mother is orange, for it is not right for the child to grow old at the same time as the parent. If you seek a reason for the fertility that doubles these fruits, such that the mother carries twinned offspring in her uterus: I have observed this in similar fruit already mentioned, namely, the abundance of seeds.

(Aurantium hoc instar limonis alios includentis feracitatem arboris fux aliquatenus aemulatur, dum foetus quanvis abortivus invalido nisu parturit, non parit. Ita & hoc & prozime exhibendum, genere neutrale, a se ipso degenerat, vel in foeminam, vel in androgynum. Pomo foetiferum magnitudine mediocri est ... medulla vero alias decem spicarum alias plurium ... intimaque quatuor fere spicarum medulla coaugmentatum: per hiantem umbilicum promente se nunc quidem magis, nunc vero minus consertim semiconspicua pomorum quadam pullitie: quae retinent aliquandiu videntem, flavente matre. Nam aequum non est, simul filium, cum parente contenescere. Si causam quaeras geminantis haec poma foecunditatis, ut mater utero fobolem sibi gemellam ferat: eam habeo monstrare, quae mihi se pervestiganti obtulit praedictis in pomis consimilibus, nempe seminis affluentiam.) (Ferrari 403)

The generation of monsters, both human and botanical, takes place inside the mother's body. In early modern Europe the most common medical explanation for the birth of a monstrous child was the maternal imagination: if a woman's imagination was excessively impressed during pregnancy – by something she saw, desired, or experienced, most commonly – the unborn child would bear its visible mark.¹² Braidotti criticizes this belief for the way it insidiously assimilates “the pregnant woman to an unstable, potentially sick subject, vulnerable to uncontrollable emotions” (*Metamorphoses* 299): the womb is a dangerous place to be, a place where the father's fetus – an offspring enjoying good health at the time of conception – can become the mother's monster due to the pregnant woman's powerful desire and imagination. Fear of the maternal imagination, for this critic, is due to the pregnant body's ability “to undo the father's signature and uncreate life” (*Metamorphoses* 203). From a more historical perspective Huet remarks: “The power of the maternal imagination over the formation of the fetus, and more precisely its role in the formation of monsters, gave rise to one of the most intense debates of French classicism ... the quarrel of the imaginationists divided philosophers and scientists into two factions: those who attributed responsibility for monstrous births to the mother's imagination, and those who maintained that in any case, the feminine role in procreation was too passive to be held responsible for the shape of progeny, even monstrous ones” (720). The monster, whether human or non-human, is the tangible sign of this dangerous, subversive ability on the part of the pregnant body.¹³

Whether they take on a male or a female form, whether they most resemble breasts, penises, or pregnant bellies, there is no question that citrus fruit, in the minds of baroque writers of both literary and scientific texts, like to imitate the human body in eerie, one might say even uncanny, ways – strangely familiar in the Freudian sense or, better yet, familiar and strange at the same time. (This sexualized personification of oranges may still be found in Hyman's recent book on oranges, where we read, “Citrus fruit are almost wantonly promiscuous: they reproduce easily with each other and many crosses and mutations are known ... In some cases, they are self-pollinating and are also able to produce fruit and fertile seeds without sexual mixing ... There are constant surprises, as it does not always breed true to seed,” 45.) We know what pregnancy looks like, for it is a familiar sight among humans, but we do not expect to see it in oranges. Given this tendency of citrus fruit to acquire a monstrous

or at least marvellous shape – a pregnant shape, of all things – even if only in the eye of the beholder, we could say about citrus fruit, and especially about “pregnant” citrus fruit, in relation to other fruit, what feminist theorist Margrit Shildrick writes about the pregnant body in relation to other bodies. In *Embodying the Monster*, Shildrick claims that “the pregnant female body itself is always a trope of immense power in that it speaks to an inherent capacity to problematize the boundaries of self and other” (31).¹⁴

The boundaries between self and other are indeed problematic in the taxonomy of citrus fruit, and even Ferrari in his *Hesperides* seems to be sometimes at a loss when he has to include within his taxonomic effort fruits that are not clearly one or another type, or even not clearly one or more than one – much like the pregnant female body. The blurring of lines between one body and another, so visibly enacted by the pregnant human body, is also the effect of hybrids and of pregnant citrus fruit, unable to respect those boundaries of oneness that are essential to any effective taxonomy and nomenclature. Against this boundlessness, botany must fight, for botany is a science obsessed with words and names no less than is poetry. “Botany,” historian of science Lorraine Daston has memorably written, “is the science that strives to undo the mischief of Babel” (“Type Specimens and Scientific Memory” 153). Like many of the scientists who were his colleagues in the Accademia dei Lincei, about whom it has been written that “nothing obsessed [them] more than phenomena which seemed to stand on the borderlines between classes ... or what they called species of ambiguous or doubtful nature” (Freedberg, “Series B” 39), Ferrari set out to put order into the citrus family.¹⁵ Hybrid, pregnant fruit, generally recognized as monsters in the early modern age, were especially important to Ferrari, not least because they interfered with his stated purpose, namely an unprecedented classification of the whole of the citrus family into visually distinctive and easy-to-distinguish genera. As Canguilhem reminds us at the very start of his classic essay “Monstrosity and the Monstrous,” “the existence of monsters throws doubt on life’s ability to teach us order” (27). By focusing on oranges – *Hesperides* contains no fewer than ten different types of them, including the female orange (*Aurantium foemina*), the hermaphroditic orange (*Aurantium hermaphroditum*), and the distorted orange (*Aurantium distortum*) – we see how Ferrari worked to teach Nature a sense of order that, in the case of these fruits especially, and pregnant ones more than others, she seemed to have too often overlooked.

Ferrari's Citrus Myths of Origin

In today's popular culture, including respectable venues such as the Mayo Clinic's publications, women are sometimes invited to understand their body shape as that of either a pear or an apple, depending on whether the wider part of their torso is located at the bottom or at the top – or that of a banana if their torso has a similar width throughout. ("People who have metabolic syndrome typically have apple-shaped bodies, meaning they have larger waists and carry a lot of weight around their abdomens. It's thought that having a pear-shaped body – that is, carrying more of your weight around your hips and having a narrower waist – doesn't increase your risk of diabetes, heart disease and other complications of metabolic syndrome," "Apple and Pear Body Shapes.") With this invitation to see our body as like a pear or like a less desirable apple we are being asked to participate in a venerable association of women with fruit that has illustrious antecedents in centuries of cultural representations both visual and verbal. In Ferrari's *Hesperides*, for example, citrus fruit is cut up and then illustrated in order to demonstrate how it imitates, in its sexual habits and pregnant appearance, the sexual and reproductive behaviour of women. Owing to the perceived similarities between them, fruit and women in some early modern texts (and occasionally in contemporary ones) find themselves on the verge of being confused with one another and about to become marvel-inspiring hybrids of sorts – women-like fruit, fruit-like women. Marvel, as a literary critic notes about seventeenth-century France, with words that apply just as well to this same historical period in Italy, "is one of the profound organizational forces of the early modern, the essence of connection, transformation, fantasy, and change. It made bodies into sites of tales and objects of collection, and drew them into strategies of display, knowledge, and pleasure" (Hoffmann 81). Marvel certainly organized the representation of the metamorphosis of human beings into plants during the Italian baroque, as well, especially in fairy tales such as those in Basile's *Pentameron*. To cite just one example, the marvellous and repeated transformations of citrons into women, and of a dove's mangled remains into a citron plant, are fundamental to the narrative development of the last story in the collection, "The Three Citrons."

In Ferrari's book the marvels described in the scholarly Latin text are spectacularly mirrored in the book's more generally accessible illustrations. In addition to its great botanical precision, *Hesperides* is graced by

numerous high-quality etchings based on the drawings of such baroque European masters as Guido Reni, Pietro da Cortona, Domenichino, and Nicolas Poussin. The book has been lavishly praised for the unprecedented quality and quantity of its illustrations. Although earlier botanical treatises included woodcuts to illustrate their contents, and Ferrari's own *De florum cultura* contained twenty illustrations, in the words of art historian and Ferrari specialist David Freedberg, who has dedicated several essays to the production of Ferrari's *Hesperides*, "there is nothing in the history of botanical illustration to prepare us for the concentration on one genus that we see here ... Never had the insides of citrus fruit been depicted with such care, never had the surfaces of their peel been shown with such obsessive attention" ("Ferrari and the Pregnant Lemons of Pietrasanta" 43–4). In addition to the etiological myths and other allegorical stories illustrated by prominent contemporary artists (Giovanni Lanfranco, Francesco Albani, Andrea Sacchi, and Giovanni Francesco Romanelli, along with the even more famous artists mentioned earlier in this paragraph), the book abounds in botanical plates painted by illustrator Vincenzo Leonardi (1589–1657), a large number of which are dedicated to teratological specimens – "this concentration emerges not so much from the *Hesperides* itself, as from the group of surviving drawings," Freedberg notes ("Cassiano, Ferrari, and Their Drawings of Citrus Fruit" 68). The visual aspect of Ferrari's book is integral to the work as a whole, especially when one remembers the importance of artistic illustration to the history and, indeed, the very birth and early development of the science of botany. As Maura Flannery puts it, "the foundations of modern botany were laid by the artist rather than by the scientist," and "the history of botany is also to a certain extent the history of art, one in which the progress in the systematic exploration of the natural world is matched by the advance in the quality of the means used to represent that world" (117). The exceptional quality of Ferrari's botanical illustrations, such as those of the pregnant citrus fruit, works in *Hesperides* to reinforce the book's implicit message, which it shares with fairy tales, about the "unitary substance of all," humans and plants included.

Ferrari is loosely inspired by the story of Myrrha's pregnancy and birth of Adonis in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* when he invents three original, reproductive myths in his *Hesperides* – one dedicated to citrons, another to lemons, and the third to oranges. These myths explain, through fictional narratives, that which science alone was unable to explain until the discovery of *Aceria sheldoni*: namely, the existence of especially strange citrus fruit, digitated and/or pregnant. Despite his reliance on Ovid's ancient

Myrrha narrative and on Pontano's Renaissance Latin poem on citrus fruit, *De hortis Hesperidum*, discussed in the previous chapter, Ferrari, rather surprisingly, does not mention Adonis at all in his long tome. This has led Italian literary scholar Carlo Caruso, in his book on the literary representation of Adonis in the Italian Renaissance, to wonder about "the glaring absence of references to Adonis in contexts where one would expect such references to turn up on every page" (103). Caruso continues: "The absence of any reference to Adonis [in Ferrari's book] is ... striking, especially given the fact that about 200 lines from Pontano's *Hortis Hesperidum* are transcribed in Ferrari's *Hesperides* – one sixth of the entire poem. It is therefore clear that the omission is deliberate" (107). Adonis's presence in Ferrari's book is nevertheless made palpable through the reliance of its three myths on Ovid's Myrrha, Adonis's mother, and through the frequent and long quotations from Pontano's *De hortis Hesperidum* – the very text that in the previous century had first established a poetic connection between Adonis and citrus fruit.

Ferrari recounts his three myths when he is at a loss to explain scientifically the existence of monstrous versions of citrus fruit. Although his pairing of literary and scientific explanations seems absurd to us – for we do not normally believe that science has much to learn from literary fictions – that was not the case in seventeenth-century Europe. Ferrari did not include his myths as a marketing ploy or as a decoration to the more "serious" remainder of the book. Rather, for him as for many of his contemporaries, the use of ancient allegory was believed to provide assistance in the intellectual ordering of nature – an undertaking with which Ferrari clearly needed help. His culture "would have seen no conflict between literary delectation, ancient allegory, the connoisseurship of classicizing art, scrupulous observation, intellectual ordering, and horticultural function" (Kemp 212). Ferrari was regarded as a serious scientist, one who was involved in the Accademia dei Lincei founded by Federico Cesi and boasting the participation of Galileo Galilei. The latter, it bears noting, was well aware of his contemporaries' love of citrus fruit when, in his 1632 *Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi del mondo* (*Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*), he used the image of an orange to show the high value of soil, claiming that, should soil be as scarce as gems or precious metals, every prince would be happy to spend many "diamonds and rubies and four cartloads of gold to have just enough soil to plant in a small pot a jasmine or sow in it a small China orange tree, so as to see it come up, grow, and produce such beautiful fronds, such scented flowers and such fine fruits" (*diamanti e di rubini e*

quattro carrate di oro per aver solamente tanta terra quanta bastasse per piantare in un picciol vaso un gelsomino o seminarvi un arancino della Cina, per vederlo nascere, crescere e produrre sì belle frondi, fiori così odorosi e sì gentili frutti; 74).

In line with its scientific aspirations, Ferrari's *Hesperides* is the first book to have a botanical illustration made with the aid of a microscope. Thus, although we may perceive Ferrari's mythological explanations as simplistic and inadequate today, and certainly not "scientific" by contemporary standards, his detailed and focused work, along with his extraordinary attention to botanical exceptions such as monstrous, pregnant fruit, has identified him as a close ally of the more strictly scientific research of some of his friends, such as Federico Cesi (1585–1630) – one of Linnaeus's most important predecessors – not coincidentally because Cesi had stated that only a study of the reproductive system of plants would help us to understand those borderline, ambiguous cases that so fascinated Ferrari. (It bears remembering that the attribution of sex to plants was still quite controversial as late as the eighteenth century.) For these reasons it could be said that Ferrari's careful emphasis on pregnant fruit, and the taxonomical impetus at the heart of his *Hesperides*, put him in the direct genealogical line of scientists such as Linnaeus.

Taxonomy includes etiology, and Ferrari's myths are used to explain, respectively, the origin of the "multiform citron," with the description of the botanical metamorphosis of the youth Harmonillus (*"Malum citrum digitatum multiforme,"* but also the origin of another citrus fruit, the "river lemon," *Limon a rivo seu rio*); the origin of the "citrated-lemon that contains others," with the narrative about the transformation into a tree of Harmonillus's mother, Tirsenia (but also "another shape of the citrated lemon that contains others," *Aliae formae citrati limonis alios includentis*); and the origin of the "female, or foetus-bearing orange" and the "distorted orange," with the metamorphosis experienced by Harmonillus's sister Leonilla (the *"Aurantium foetiferum"* I discussed earlier, but also the "horned orange," *Aurantium seu corniculatum*, and the misshapen orange, *Aurantium distortum*). Each story explains the origin of a teratological type among the three types of citrus discussed in the book: citrons, lemons, and oranges. These three aetiological myths are all related to the issue of reproduction and birth, with varying degrees of allusion to the process of human pregnancy as it helps to classify a variety of botanical specimens.

Ferrari's first myth in the *Hesperides* involves the transformation of a handsome young man, Harmonillus, into a tree producing deformed

citrons, including digitated ones. The illustration for this story consists of an etching by the Dutch engraver Cornelis Bloemaert (ca. 1603–92), after a painting by the Italian artist Andrea Sacchi (1599–1661). The illustration shows the transformation of Harmonillus's hands into slim branches bearing fingered citrons, and of one of his feet into roots; meanwhile two elderly women grab and shove him, children and teens look and brazenly point their finger at him, and an adult man – Harmonillus's tutor Cleomedes, who comes to his rescue, alas, too late – blocks his path. Harmonillus's transformation is caused by the desire, and specifically the envy, of a woman – an old one, past childbearing age, who envies Harmonillus's beautiful voice and persecutes him; he ends up crying so much that he waters himself into botanical existence (this abundance of tears links the human body to the needs of plants and is thus reminiscent of Venus's tears in Pontano's *De hortis Hesperidum*). The desire of this old crone sets the two other transformations in motion as well, transformations that are caused by a mother's and then a daughter's passionate grieving. Harmonillus's story serves to illustrate Ferrari's description of the *Malum citreum multiforme* (the multiform citron) and the *Limon a rivo seu rio* (the river lemon). In *Hesperides*, readers can enjoy Sacchi's illustration of Harmonillus's narrative as well as an individual botanical illustration of the multiform citron (not surprisingly, Harmonillus's beautiful and androgynous appearance in this illustration has caused some viewers to mistake him for a female nymph).¹⁶ Interestingly enough, however, the illustration of the multiform citron displays a shape that is neither digitated nor pregnant and thus bears little resemblance to the fruit represented in the Harmonillus etching. Ferrari does not provide an illustration of the digitated citron, maybe because it will star in the next myth as an image of the pregnant womb. It is as if the author wanted to keep us in suspense about the appearance of this striking fruit but also it is as if the boundary-defying citrus fruits that Ferrari tried so hard to tame and classify escaped this author's grip and showed up where they did not belong. Desire, though fertile, is clearly problematic and sometimes dangerous – as well as, in this and other cases, marvel inspiring.

The narratives in the other two myths depend on Harmonillus's myth for their very existence. Harmonillus's mother, Tirsenia, is identified as the origin of two types of "pregnant" lemons, and of the digitated fruits that appear both as citrons (though, again, Ferrari does not illustrate this) and as lemons. When a servant tells Tirsenia about Harmonillus's metamorphosis, he hands her one of the fruits from the tree that used to be her son. At this, the fingers of Tirsenia's right hand wrap around

a fingered citron – picked from her own son's tree, Ferrari explains, signifying that, just as she once carried him within her body in pregnancy, she now contains him within her hand. Tirsenia then changes into a lemon tree that produces "pregnant" fruit:

her right hand embraces the fruit, and turns a pale citrus colour, and little by little, pregnant with the same fruit she had grasped, Tirsenia becomes a strange lemon tree, so that her son again may be seen to be carried in his mother's womb. The fruit has a very sweet scent and taste, because love has ripened it.

(*manus dextera, pomum complexa, citrino colore pallet, fitque paulatim novus limon, incluso consimili pomo praegnans: ut filius materno iterum geri utero videatur. Odor pomo saporque suavissimus: quippe illud maturavit amor.*) (Ferrari 274)

Sweet scent and taste are good scent and taste, and in traditional and early modern medicine good taste, as I have discussed in the first chapter, is good for you – just like mother's milk, the first food and the ultimate sweet food. Pregnant fruits, for Ferrari, mirror pregnant women, and the taste of maternal fruit is like the taste of mother's milk. An illustration of this mother-and-son scene by Romanelli shows Tirsenia in a more advanced state of metamorphosis than Harmonillus was in the illustration of his own myth; her hair has already turned into leaves, and the waist and bottom of her dress into a trunk. This mother's painful experience of transformation, her inability to sustain a human shape that is also no longer available to her own son, makes her a "tragic monstrosity," a suffering being entombed in a tree – much like Ovid's Myrrha who, in the words of a critic, became "a tree with a mind entirely given over to inarticulate suffering," a being whose "deformity and alienation [is] driven to the limit of the imaginable – solitary confinement by one's own body" (Skulsky 29).

As for the third myth, upon her return from a hunt, Leonilla – Tirsenia's daughter and Harmonillus's sister – recognizes her mother transformed into the lemon tree she was planning to use for target practice. Tirsenia explains how her hands have been turned into lemons and her human form into that of a golden tree so that she might not be separated from her son: "So that his flesh might not be ripped away from the embrace of my hand, my own body – out of the heat of my golden love – turned into a fruit and into a tomb for my golden son" (Ne charo

divellatur a complexu manus, extimum transit in pomum, & in prolis aureae sepulcrum, ab amoris calore coloris aurei; Ferrari 418). In embracing the tree that once was her mother, Leonilla – like her brother before her – waters herself with her own tears into a citrus tree, bearing pregnant oranges that resemble the modern navel oranges: “And then Leonilla turned entirely into an orange tree, golden more because of her temperament than because of her hair; the tree was amazingly laden with elegantly monstrous fruit, distorted in diverse shapes, emulating her mother’s and her brother’s fruit, as if imitating her family.” (Universa denique Leonilla, indole magis quam crine aurea, in auranti-am demigravit, fructu mire congesto, & varias in figuras pulchre distorto matris fratrisque poma, eleganter monstrosa, haereditario velut imitamento aemulantem; Ferrari 418.) The very fruit whose origin this story is supposed to tell is absent from Domenichino’s touching illustration, which shows instead the “*Limon citratus*” that had been illustrated in the previous book, with the story of Tirsensia – so that on the ground, oddly enough, we see the pregnant lemons that have fallen from Tirsensia the lemon-tree, rather than the fruit produced by Leonilla the orange tree. Leonilla, after all, has not yet been transformed; she is not yet a mother, not yet ready to reproduce in a normal way, so that her youth and lack of experience help to explain the strangeness of the fruit produced by the tree into which she turns: “There were some, however, who ... said it was not surprising that the tree of a virgin, herself an undeveloped offspring, should give birth to abortive fruit” (Fuit autem ... qui diceret, mirandum non esse, quod arbor virginis, ad partum rudis, fructus pareret abortivos; Ferrari 418).

In his praise of Domenichino’s painting on which is based the etching that illustrates the scene of Leonilla’s transformation into an orange tree, Ferrari borrows a female metaphor of pregnancy and birth on behalf of a male painter. Thus, Ferrari writes that, although the artist, Domenichino (the nickname of Domenico Zampieri), had to represent an aborted fruit, his own art did not abort: “But in the pitiable story of the tree’s miscarriage, portrayed with a graphic representation, Domenico Zampieri, your art, ignorant of mistakes, did not miscarry” (At in abortus arborei miseranda fabula, graphico spectaculo exhibita, non abortavit ars tua errare nescia, Dominice Zamperi; Ferrari 421). With his visual emphasis on the monstrosity that is Tirsensia’s tree – her contorted face emerges, in the shadows, out of the side of the tree trunk, while Leonilla’s outstretched arms attempt to embrace her mother, even as she herself is being metamorphosed into a tree to join her – Domenichino graphically

illustrates Shildrick's observation that "the encounter with the others who define our own boundaries of normality must inevitably disturb, for they are both irreducibly strange and disconcertingly familiar, both opaque and reflective. They enable us to recognize ourselves; they are our own object" (69). Leonilla and Tirsenia, daughter and mother, were once one, for Tirsenia contained Leonilla in her womb, much like she also once contained Harmonillus – and this is something that Tirsenia herself states in her own myth. Now, captured within the citrus tree trunk that she has become, Tirsenia looks onto her daughter who is in the process of metamorphosing into a botanical being like her mother: Leonilla's foot has already sunken, root-like, into the soil, next to one of the fruits of her mother – a distorted lemon.

With words that may be applied to the citrus encounter between Tirsenia and Leonilla especially, as well as to Ferrari's two other citrus myths, philosopher Iris Young notes that "in pregnancy I literally do not have a firm sense of where my body ends and the world begins" (50). The permeability of the female body is such that, in Ferrari's three botanical transformations, it is the women who imitate the citrus plant they love and who confuse the boundaries between self and other, animate and inanimate: Tirsenia reproduces Harmonillus, now a citron tree, and Leonilla imitates Tirsenia, now turned into a lemon tree. These women are vulnerable to their own love for the other, guilty of excessive sympathy, responsible for repeating that which has already taken place, and in this process erase the differences between self and other much like what happens in the process of pregnancy and in the nomenclature of citrus fruit. This repetition or reproduction that is the two women's primary trait, interestingly enough, reappears in Ferrari's citrus illustrations, for we see the double lemon both in Romanelli's and in Domenichino's etchings, as if each artist had not seen the other's work. Freedberg makes this very point when he notes that the artists "seem to have made their drawings in ignorance of each other (for all their close adherence to Ferrari's text). So while the narrative thread from one episode to another in Ferrari is clear enough, the same cannot be said of the plates" ("Cassiano, Ferrari and Their Drawings of Citrus Fruit" 64).

Repetition also reappears in a reproduction of the Leonilla illustration by Domenichino that expert art historian John Pope-Hennessy, a scholar of the Italian Renaissance, has included in his monograph on this artist. Pope-Hennessy mistakenly but significantly misidentifies Domenichino's image of Tirsenia and Leonilla as representing Myrrha when she gives birth to Adonis with the help of Lucina, as told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

(Pope-Hennessy, plate 69, catalogue number 1271, described on page 105). In Pope-Hennessy's reading of the tree-human hybrid the head of the woman who has already transformed into a tree – Tirsensia – is mistaken for the head of an emerging baby – Adonis – with a confusion that reveals the popularity of the Myrrha story even well beyond antiquity and the Renaissance, the uniqueness and relative obscurity of Ferrari's own myths as developed in his *Hesperides*, and the identity confusion between a woman and the offspring she carries – that erasure of the boundaries between the two that is a staple of the discourse in and around pregnancy.

Indeed the maternal body, in Ferrari's baroque botanical treatise on citrus fruit – not the first place in which one might look for the representation of pregnancy – is a grotesque body, to use Mikhail Bakhtin's influential definition of this trope: a body that is open, penetrable, “a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body” (317). The grotesque body is the site of impregnation and childbirth, as well as the site of what Calvino, speaking of fairy tales, called “the unitary substance of all”; the grotesque body is also the “body” of citrus fruit, of fruit represented as (part of) a human body. As Bakhtin observes, “all these convexities and orifices have a common characteristic; it is within them that the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome: there is an interchange and an interorientation” (317). This abolition of confines, this overcoming of the boundary between body and world, allows for the “unitary substance of all” that in turn invites us to make sense of pregnant fruit and of fruit-like women. Tirsensia's head, in Domenichino's picture of the lemon tree that she has become, is not much more than an especially deformed bump on the side of the trunk that used to be her torso – although this mother's head can easily be confused with a different sort of head, one that is about to emerge from the tree in the process of birth: the child's. In this same picture Leonilla's foot is, by now, not much more than a root: no longer human, certainly, but not yet a plant. Basile's citron fairies, Ferrari's pregnant oranges, Domenichino's birthing tree – baroque writers and artists strove to express the ways in which pregnancy makes of the female body the very icon of metamorphosis, and found in its analogies with citrus fruit an effective way of sharing their marvelled fascination.

CHAPTER 4



Strange Fruit: Violence and the Sacred in the Economy of Citrus

Oranges and Wealth in Early Modern Times

The iconography of Saint Nicholas, the holy man whose name, in English-speaking countries, eventually morphed into the beloved one of Santa Claus, often includes three golden globes in the saint's hand. Sometimes they are rather generic-looking balls; at other times these globes clearly look like oranges.¹ In a number of paintings that include Saint Nicholas, such as Cima da Conegliano's *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints* (1496–9) and Antonello da Messina's *San Cassiano Altarpiece* (1475), this saint holds up a book on which are poised three golden spheres that could be interpreted as oranges. Oranges make an important appearance in the Christmas legend of this fourth-century saint, a wealthy and generous bishop who lived in the city of Myra in Asia Minor. In what is perhaps his most famous exploit Nicholas provided dowries for three impoverished young women by dropping three round pouches full of coins down their chimney; from here, the pouches landed in stockings (or shoes) that had been set to dry close to the fireplace. Nicholas's gifts were anonymous, and he discreetly used the chimney as his method of delivery so as not to call attention to his own generosity and to avoid hurting the pride of the young women's father (Melton 638). In some versions the three round pouches are replaced by three golden balls, which the popular imagination later identified both as coins (round

balls are also the symbols of pawnshops) and – once this fruit became known to Europeans – as oranges. This is the origin, perhaps, of the custom of giving oranges to children at Christmas time: oranges are symbols of Saint Nicholas's, or Santa Claus's, gift of wealth, and sport the same round shape as the most popular Christmas ornaments.² In addition, until recently oranges represented a costly commodity in those places that did not grow them. As they are winter fruits and their trees are evergreen, oranges also came to symbolize the regeneration of life at Christmas time, when they served both as decoration and as delicacy.

Thus, the six red balls on the Medici family's escutcheon, some say, really represent oranges (rather than their more common identification as symbols of pawnshops or medicine), recalling one of the Latin words for this fruit that also hints at the name of the powerful Florentine clan. *Mala Medica*, literally the apples from Media (a region corresponding to present-day northwestern Iran), was the Latin name for citrons, but also to an Italian ear this name sounds like "the apples of the Medici." In Tolkowsky's words, "the mysterious *palle* in the escutcheon of Florence's most brilliant dynasty of rulers are probably nothing else but oranges, just plain oranges" (169). The famed Florentine family, whose name may be derived from the medical and/or pharmaceutical work performed by their ancestors, very much enjoyed and encouraged this botanical association of their family name with the golden apples of mythology, so admired in antiquity-loving Renaissance Italy. Thus, in 1513, Pope Leo X Medici decided to celebrate Carnival with a new activity that became known as the Battle of the Oranges: oranges were already associated with Carnival because their shape and colour were reminiscent of the sun, and Carnival celebrates, among other things, the increasing daylight at the end of the dark winter season and the return of fertility. As we read in *The Medici Popes*, two opposing sides who had been set up by Leo – both consisting of papal servants – were supposed to pelt "each other vigorously with the yellow fruit, of which an unlimited supply had been provided to serve as missiles" (Vaughan 190).³

Also, as a result of their generous patrons' attachment to both physical and symbolic citrus fruit, artists working at the service of the Medici family developed the habit of including orange trees in their paintings. For example, we see orange trees laden with bright and round fruit in Paolo Uccello's *Battle of San Romano* (ca. 1450), a battle scene unfolding in an orange garden. Even more famous – indeed, widely regarded as one of the most popular and written-about paintings in the world – is Sandro Botticelli's celebrated *Primavera* (ca. 1482), a large tempera allegory of

Springtime probably meant to commemorate a Medici marriage (that of Lorenzo de' Pierfrancesco de' Medici in 1482) and intended to hang in a bedchamber; the orange fruits in the painting indicate the Medicis' wealth and fertility, with their botanical symbolism enhanced by the presence of the goddess of love and sex herself, Venus, at the centre of the scene. Possibly, the orange grove in which the scene is set is nothing other than the Garden of the Hesperides of ancient myth. In Medici-sponsored art, including Botticelli's *Primavera*, oranges are exaggeratedly orange and spherical so as to emphasize their reference to the Medici coat of arms. This family's gardens continued to be renowned beyond the age of the Renaissance for their diverse and abundant citrus groves: in 1715 the painter Bartolomeo Bimbi (1648–1730), having worked for the Grand Duke Cosimo de' Medici since 1685, recorded in four different canvases about 114 different varieties of citrus fruit from the Medici gardens; these paintings are of enormous documentary importance for the history of botany (Tomasi and Hirschauer 93–4; Hubert 206). Interestingly, the numbers indicating the names of the fruit, listed in the cartouche located at the bottom of the picture, are not painted directly on the fruit – as was the case with other types of fruit in Bimbi's work – but rather “appear on small white tags that are tied to the plants, following the practice of labeling plants in botanical gardens” (Hubert 211).

However inexpensive and widely available oranges are today, for most of their history in Europe, and particularly in countries that did not grow them, oranges were a precious commodity and a sign of Mediterranean wealth, pointing to both secular and spiritual aristocracy. That oranges, once the fruit of the wealthy, should now be easily available can be explained through “a well-recognized phenomenon in the history of luxury goods,” namely “the ‘trickle-down’ effect which refers to the tendency of luxury goods to change status over time from being desired by many but possessed by few, to becoming widely available and, ultimately, to being deemed social necessities. Classic examples include the history of sugar, coffee, tea, chocolate, televisions and indoor sanitation” (Veen 409). Oranges frequently appeared on the tables of the nobility as well as in representations of the Last Supper. Tolkowsky notes that “the religious iconography of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance confirms what the written records have already told us, namely that oranges, citrons, and lemons remained, for a surprisingly long time, a luxury fit only for the table of kings and princes” (150). In his book *Oranges*, John McPhee points out that in the 1500s “dinner guests could measure their

importance in the regard of their hosts by the number of oranges that came to the table" (69). In northern Europe especially, during this same time period, oranges increasingly appear in art as a symbol of secular wealth. Oranges only grow in warm and temperate climates, and their presence in colder places required transportation that was not always as easy as it is today, particularly in the absence of readily available refrigeration. In the 1514 Dutch painting by Quentin Matsys titled *The Money Lender and His Wife* and hanging at the Louvre, for example, viewers can clearly see an orange on the bookshelf behind the couple; the orange signified the wealth of the people portrayed, people who were wealthy enough to lend their money to others, in fact – and whose greedy gestures and expressions are typical of this painter's penchant for caricature and satire. For this same reason an orange appears next to the window in Hieronymous Bosch's representation of Pride, Superbia, in his painting of *The Seven Deadly Sins* (ca. 1500); a demon is holding a mirror in front of a woman in a room replete with luxury items, including an orange, each of them a cause of pride to its owner.

In the famed *Arnolfini Portrait*, painted in 1434 by the Netherlandish artist Jan van Eyck and on exhibit in the National Gallery in London, we see three oranges beneath the window in the couple's home in Bruges. (These oranges, interestingly enough, are not reflected as they should be in the convex mirror on the wall behind them, likely as the result of an imperfect restoration; Kay 111). Oranges, in addition to being a documented part of the marriage ritual from the sixteenth century on, were also regarded during this time period, and as we have seen in the second chapter, as the fruit of Venus and love, as well as a sign of certain wealth. So, for example, the casting of "golden apples" was part of the courtship ritual of the thirteenth-century nobility in Giovanni Arnolfini's native Tuscany, where such an action was considered a declaration of love (Bedaux 22). In an article that tells the story of Van Eyck's characters in the *Arnolfini Portrait*, art historian Linda Seidel claims that personal narrative helps us to read the painting: Giovanna's great-uncle Dino Cenami, to mention one relevant biographical detail, was a Tuscan merchant with offices in Flemish cities such as Bruges and Antwerp, and he was, among other things, a purveyor of exotic commodities such as cloves, ginger, and oranges (Seidel 74). The oranges on the Arnolfinis' windowsill are a complicated object, then, and not just a snack as they might appear to the contemporary viewer. They transmit a message that is both financial and erotic and perhaps not unlike the woman's swollen belly, which they mirror in their shape. As another art historian put

it, “some may argue that, in a painting, an orange cannot refer simultaneously to fertility, temptation, and nobility ... In this case it seems that an artist with van Eyck’s power of observation and synthesis must have been able to understand that, within the context of people’s lives, objects could have multiple associations. The artist had an eye for the significant detail that can reveal the complexity of these people’s story” (Harbison 288–9).⁴

The aristocratic connotations of citrus fruit as a food of the wealthy, along with its historical and geographical connection with the Holy Land, led to its regular appearances in artistic representations of the Last Supper in Renaissance Italy. Indeed, it has been claimed that “the presence of citrus fruits as an indispensable requisite on the table on which the Last Supper is served appears to have become, with the painters of the Italian Renaissance, a conventional rule to which only few dissenters are found” (Tolkowsky 153). Markers of nobility and of biblical geography, citrus fruit enjoyed other symbolic connotations, as well. By being identified with Adam’s apple eaten in Eden, as we have seen with the fruit in Eve’s hands in Jan van Eyck’s *Ghent Altarpiece*, oranges symbolized both the Fall and the positive consequence of this *felix culpa*, namely Christ’s redemption through his death and resurrection.

In his 1480 fresco of the *Last Supper*, located in the convent refectory of the Church of Ognissanti in Florence, Domenico Ghirlandaio – sometimes described as the photographer of his time for his realistic attention to detail – painted two apricots on one end of the table and two oranges on the other, with the apricots symbolizing the Fall or sin, and the oranges standing for Redemption or paradise. Citrus trees in an orchard are visible in the background of Ghirlandaio’s fresco, where, through the arched windows, viewers enjoy the sight of verdant branches heavily loaded with bright oranges, lemons, and citrons. Oranges may be seen on the table in Titian’s *Last Supper* (1557–64), as well as at his *Dinner at Emmaus* (1530–5). Finally, there are lemons and oranges, some of them still clinging to their leafy stem, visible in a reproduction from the 1800s of Leonardo da Vinci’s much celebrated *Last Supper* (ca. 1498), in the refectory of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan. For a long time this fresco was far too ruined to allow a positive identification of the fruit on the table. Thanks to a thorough restoration carried out in 1997, specialists were able to establish the identity of the foods present at this, “the most famous dinner party of all time,” as food historian John Varriano describes it, and they include “sections of grilled eel garnished with orange slices” (Varriano, “At Supper with Leonardo” 75–6). The presence of

oranges on the table of the Last Supper was motivated by their status as symbols of wealth and of the Holy Land and, as importantly, by their popularity in Renaissance cuisine, as handed down in the first printed cookbook, *De honesta voluptate et valetudine* (1465), by Bartolomeo Sacchi (also known as Platina). Varriano continues: “Serving orange slices with fish seems to have been a popular food fad in the period just after the publication of Platina’s book” (78).⁵

The Ambivalent Value of Oranges in Sicilian Folklore

Blood oranges usually hold a less grisly name in Italian than they do in English. Although the name *arance sanguigne* (blood oranges) does exist, most people call them *arance rosse* (red oranges). The most valued ones come from Sicily and are protected with the initials IGP, meaning Indicazione Geografica Protetta (Protected Geographic Indication). Sicilian red oranges can belong to three main varieties: Tarocco, Moro, and Sanguinello. Only the name of the last of these three varieties directly evokes the body fluid that distinguishes these oranges in English. (Clarissa Hyman notes that “a romantic but unlikely story links blood oranges with the Crusades; more probably the thorny trees were a seventeenth-century mutation originating in Sicily and, possibly, Malta”; 43.) In a thirty-second television commercial from 2010, advertising the authentic Sicilian blood oranges it describes as “Arancia rossa di Sicilia IGP,” the extreme close-up of an enormous bright orange fruit – only part of it fits the left side of the screen – with its numerous bumps and bright shine magnified by the high-definition resolution, slowly revolves against a flat, black background. Gentle piano notes accompany this visual display, a dance of sorts, as a suave male voice slowly speaks to the orange itself (or, one is tempted to say, to the orange *herself*): “I love the world that you are. With great energy you defend your red secret. In you are ancient virtues and memories: Etna, the sun, recollections of the earth. You are flavor, you are color, you are a marvel of nature. A delight for my palate.” (Amo il mondo che sei. Con vigore difendi il tuo rosso segreto. In te virtù e memorie antiche: l’Etna, il sole, ricordi della terra. Tu sapore, tu colore, tu meraviglia della natura. Delizia per il mio palato; Di Stefano.) The orange being advertised is quintessential because it is both red *and* comes from Sicily. The added promise provided by the initials IGP assures the buyer that the oranges being bought come indeed from Sicily, rather than being picked, for example, from Sicilian trees grown somewhere else. This close bond between Sicily and the best of citrus fruit has even been invoked in John

Dickie's history of the mafia, in which he claims that high financial profits produced by Sicily's citrus groves in the nineteenth century – in 1860, “it was calculated that Sicily's lemon groves were the most profitable agricultural land in Europe” (39) – combined with the risks implicit in the production of citrus (its vulnerability to lack of water and to vandalism), “created the perfect environment for the mafia's protection rackets” (39), so that, according to Dickie, we can plausibly suppose that the mafia came into existence among Sicily's lemon groves in the 1870s.

Both the television commercial and Dickie's historical thesis tie oranges to financial profit and feature their role as a precious and unique commodity. Consumer research teaches us that the attribution of quintessence to a commodity (the most orangey of all oranges, for example, or the most Sicilian of all Sicilian oranges) comes with a degree of sacredness – the sacred being a concept also implicit in Marx's idea of “commodity fetishism,” given the religious origin of the term *fetish*. Quintessence and sacredness are “achieved over a long period of time” as well as being “bound up with authenticity” (Belk et al. 16). The Sicilian orange in the commercial described above, because it is addressed directly and individually by the speaker, is also singularized and thus set apart from all other oranges, made into a unique, singular object (Kopytoff 73–4). The orange on the screen, furthermore, is anthropomorphized as well as feminized – thanks largely to the maleness of the voice and the grammatically feminine gender of oranges in Italian, *arancia*. In this, the commercial is uniquely reminiscent of Basile's fairy tale “The Three Citrons,” in which the female object of desire is embodied in a citrus fruit. Even as its status as a commodity is implied by the fact that it is being advertised in a video as something available for purchase, the quintessential and singular orange in this commercial is bathed in an “aura,” a term that is perfectly captured in Walter Benjamin's 1931 definition as “a strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be” (Benjamin 104–5). Benjamin's distance in closeness – the orange is viewed in extreme close-up, and yet the orange comes from faraway Sicily, and it is secretive – is the space of the sacred, the very space of cult and ritual that, according to Benjamin, originally gave art its own aura. It is of that distant and sacred space that the orange physically preserves the memory, as the voice-over unequivocally states.

Oranges, from the late nineteenth century well into the second millennium, are regularly represented in the literary and popular culture of southern Italy as a precious yet ambiguous commodity, one that holds

both promise and danger. We see this ambivalent status of the orange crop in a number of Sicilian writings more or less directly inspired by folklore, such as those of Giuseppe Pitrè and Luigi Capuana. Citrus fruits generally make regular appearances in folklore around the supernatural from regions such as Campania and Calabria and from Sicily especially. Thus, in a brief article on Neapolitan folklore that appeared in 1886 in the *Archivio per lo studio delle tradizioni popolari* (Archive for the study of popular traditions), co-edited by Sicilian ethnographer Giuseppe Pitrè (1841–1916), we read about a unique method of casting a spell to make someone fall in love:

One of the lovers who is unsure of being loved hires a hag, who is charged with softening the hardest of hearts. An orange or a lemon is dipped into virgin wax; a string that is oiled with the fat of a black hen is wrapped around the fruit. A hole is made into the orange, and inside it is placed the hair of the lover who is casting the spell – a small lock taken from the top of the head. At every step one must repeat an incantation. In the end, needles and pins are stuck into the pulp of the orange, and every pin that pierces and stays in the wound is accompanied by a whispered incantation ... The orange is then thrown into the well, where it rots until the lover returns to the lover. Or else it is closed inside a drawer, or walled in the kitchen, or in a beam of the ceiling. Woe to the victim! – the old wives say – he will become as thin as a tubercular patient and die of consumption.

(Uno degli amanti che non è sicuro di essere amato, interessa al caso suo una megera, che s'incarica di rammollire il cuore più duro. Un'arancia o un limone, sono bagnati nella cera vergine; intorno al frutto si avvolge uno spaghetto unto di grasso di gallina nera. Si fa un buco nell'arancia, e dentro vi si mettono capelli dell'amante che fa la fattura, una ciocchetta tagliata dal sommo del capo. A ogni operazione di queste uno scongiuro. All'ultimo si ficcano aghi e spille nella polpa dell'arancia, ed ogni spilla che la ferisce e che rimane nella ferita è accompagnata, sottovoce, da queste parole ... L'arancia è quindi buttata nel pozzo, ove infradicia sino a quando l'amante è tornato all'amante. Oppure è chiusa in un cassetto o è murata in cucina, o in una trave del soffitto. Povero chi ci capita! – dicono le comari – diventa magro come un tisico e se ne muore di consunzione.) (Pitrè and Salomone-Marino 133)

The sensuous fruit of love and desire is a citrus fruit – Venus's own golden apple, in fact – and has been since at least the Renaissance in Italy and

harking back to Mediterranean antiquity. Furthermore, the tendency of this fruit to imitate the human body binds it more closely than other fruit to bodily love and desire – whether these must be invoked, or their absence punished. Fruit and lover, in this spell as retold by Pitrè, become one and the same, so that the rotting of one leads to the death of the other.

More eloquent narratives about oranges appear in Pitrè's own 1889 *Usi e costumi, credenze e pregiudizi del popolo siciliano* (Habits and customs, beliefs and prejudices of the Sicilian people). In this book the author tells of mysterious, supernatural fairs taking place on the night of 23 June, the Eve of Saint John (whose birth is celebrated exactly six months before Jesus's own), and on other magic-religious holidays. These fairs offered, for just pennies, priceless objects such as citrus fruit made of solid gold. As it coincides with the summer solstice, the Eve of Saint John is an important feast in any syncretic understanding of the Christian sacred: "This was one of the most solemn festivals of the ancient pagan world, and numerous vestiges of it still exist throughout the greater part of Europe, after nearly two thousand years of Christianity" (Mooney 400). At one of the fairs that Pitrè describes, sacred oranges grow in an enchanted orchard that is explicitly compared to the mythological Garden of the Hesperides. In this Sicilian garden a female magical being guards and distributes the fruit, but to no avail: their intrinsic separateness and untouchability make these oranges self-destructive as soon as they come into contact with the profane world: "Although fallow, that hill is transformed by magic into a Garden of Hesperides: its plants are fully laden with beautiful golden fruit. Their guardian and dispenser is a fairy who gives them to whoever wants them: but unfortunately no sooner are they touched than they disappear." (Benché incolto, quel colle trasformatosi per incanto in un giardino di Esperidi: piante per tutto cariche di be' frutti d'oro. Guardiania e dispensiera di esse è una fata, che ne dà a chi ne vuole: ma sventuratamente non prima si toccano che svaniscono; Pitrè, *Usi e costumi* 376.)

In a legend from the area of Palermo collected by Pitrè in 1904 a herdsman stops an enraged ox by hurling at him an orange purchased at a fair the night before. The orange breaks one of the ox's horns, and the herdsman, frightened, apologizes to the owner of the herd who asks to see the remaining oranges. Realizing that they are made of solid gold, this sly owner keeps them all to himself, encouraging the herdsman to look for the one orange he threw at the ox and keep it as a memento of his crime (*Studi di leggende popolari* 302). It bears noting that the name of the agricultural area around Palermo, the Conca d'Oro (Golden

Basin), is thought by many to derive from the abundance of citrus fruit growing in it; the golden colour of this fruit is a hue that turns into precious metal in the folklore collected by Pitrè. On another occasion described in Pitrè's work, also at a night fair, a shepherd buys two oranges and gives them as a gift to his employer, who immediately realizes these oranges are made of solid gold and gives the shepherd two coins as a tip, keeping the oranges for himself (*Studi di leggende popolari* 279–80). This was the greedy employer's attempt to wipe out his debt to the giver and appear to keep the oranges as if they had been purchased, rather than gifted or, worse yet, stolen. All these tales feature precious golden oranges, uneducated workers who are unaware of the value of the fruit they own, and greedy masters who have no qualms about taking from the poor to increase the contents of their own already-brimming coffers.

Somewhat less ephemeral golden oranges may be purchased at other Sicilian fairs, Pitrè tells us, but these too are sacred, heterogeneous with respect to the profane world; consequently, not always does their monetary value survive human handling and its ensuing contamination. At "the fair of enchantments" that takes place inside a mountain that splits open for the occasion, for example, an intelligent goatherd ("un capraio di grosso cervello"; literally, a goatherd with a big brain) was beckoned inside by mysterious white figures. Within the mountain he meets lemon and orange sellers speaking an incomprehensible tongue and selling him, for two pennies, large quantities of their solid-gold oranges. After a night spent passed out in fear, he goes and tells his master everything that he has experienced; the master then uses the pretext of having the oranges blessed in order to take them away from the goatherd, in exchange for an insignificant sum of money. The golden oranges, however, once they are in the master's larcenous hands, turn into worthless snail shells. Whereas the goatherd's reverent awe kept him within the sacrosanct realm of the oranges, the tale implies, the master's greed polluted the sacred fruit (*Studi di leggende popolari* 408).

Giuseppe Pitrè's orange folklore clearly inspired his friend Luigi Capuana to write the literary fairy tale "The Golden Oranges" (*Le arance d'oro*, 1882). As Capuana scholar Gina Miele rightly notes, "although he would become celebrated for his novels, short stories, and essays, Capuana was first inspired by a fascination with folklore" (Miele 301). Capuana's tales were published shortly after the political unification of Italy (the Kingdom of Italy, united under Victor Emmanuel II, was proclaimed in 1861, with Rome incorporated nine years later). The tales were written in standard Italian, rather than in the local Sicilian dialect

with which Capuana was familiar, and they are seen as part of the intellectual work towards the cultural unification of a linguistically diverse peninsula. However standard the Italian language in which they were written, the content of these tales remains nonetheless distinctly Sicilian.

Capuana's fairy tales are an important chapter in the history of this genre in Italy, and not merely a side production on the part of this author who was best known for other types of writing altogether. Turning to Miele again: "Not since the great aesthetic production of Straparola and Basile had Italy seen such carefully constructed literary fairy tales. At the dawn of a new era in Italian history, a son of Sicily reworked a genre perfected in Venice and Naples. The blend of realism and fantasy in his fairy tales, combined with the juxtaposition of literary and oral characteristics, inspired a fairy-tale world created entirely by Capuana" (Miele 302). Capuana's tales are characterized by a unique blend of realism and fantasy, of *verismo* (the Italian equivalent, in many ways, of French naturalism) and folklore, a blend that makes them innovative of the Italian literary fairy-tale tradition: "The coexistence of *verismo* and folklore allowed Capuana to pen remarkably innovative tales, unprecedented in the Italian literary *fiaba* tradition" (Miele 307). Capuana's "The Golden Oranges" was published in the collection *C'era una volta ... fiabe* (Once upon a time ... fairy tales, 1882). Anyone familiar with Basile's tale of the citrons and Gozzi's later theatrical version of it, featuring oranges, might expect the fruit in "The Golden Oranges" to turn out to be enchanted women, as in those earlier fairy tales in which citrus appears. But this is a Sicilian narrative, informed by the author's in-depth knowledge of Sicilian culture and folklore, and oranges in Sicily come with another set of connotations than sexual ones, as a summary of the tale makes clear.

The golden oranges of Capuana's tale grow on the most precious tree in a king's garden. One morning, on his daily round to check on his treasured oranges, the king finds that they have all gone. A goldfinch had sung the guard to sleep, the same goldfinch that, one year later, also puts the king's own son to sleep – his father had entrusted him with guarding the orange tree. The following year, the king himself is put to sleep by the song of the bird, and his oranges disappear for the third time. An unkempt peasant promises to bring the criminal goldfinch to the king in exchange for the hand of the king's daughter, but the king is insulted by such a proposal and throws the peasant in jail. Meanwhile, the king's oranges are stolen once more, for the fourth season in a row. At this point, since he seems to have no other option, the king agrees to the peasant's proposal, and the peasant brings him the responsible goldfinch. The

king, however, reneges on his promise and refuses to give the peasant his daughter. As the king tortures the goldfinch to obtain the location of his oranges, he is told that they are in a cave accessible through a password known to just two men: the fearsome merchant who guards its entrance, and the peasant whom the king has sent away. So the king promises the peasant, once again, his daughter as a wife in exchange for the password to the cave. The peasant agrees, the king gets his oranges back, but once more the king reneges on his promise to the peasant. When the king arrives at the castle, however, he discovers that his bag is filled not with golden oranges, as he expected, but with rotten ones. The goldfinch, under torture again, reveals that a password known only to the peasant is needed to retrieve his golden oranges. The king promises his daughter to the peasant in exchange for the password, the peasant agrees for the third time, the king gets his golden oranges back, but the peasant – needless to say, at this point – does not get the king’s daughter as a wife: the king has changed his mind for the third time.⁶

But now that the goldfinch is in a cage, the tree bears its golden oranges once more, year after year. One day the king’s daughter asks to keep the famed goldfinch in her own room. The king agrees, but the goldfinch no longer sings. The bird tells the girl that his master weeps for not having what he wants – the king’s daughter as a wife. The bird also reveals to the princess that his master is more of a king than the king himself. This new information prompts the girl to let the goldfinch free so that he may go and tell his master about the princess’s willingness to marry him. The bird, however, does not return, and as the season of the orange harvest approaches, the princess fears her own father’s wrath over the absence of the goldfinch. Meanwhile, the French ambassador announces that the King of France wants to marry the princess. The princess refuses this offer, and her father half drowns her in order to convince her to say yes – to no avail. Finally, the king of France arrives and gives the princess – who is locked up in her room and does not want to see anyone – a gift in a box. When the girl opens the box, she finds the goldfinch inside. The King of France was the bird’s master, and he was also the uncouth peasant of the tale, the one to whom the Sicilian king had three times broken his promise. The gift from the King of France reveals the truth even as it places the Sicilian king in his debt. He and the princess marry, and she receives, as a dowry from her father, the tree of the golden oranges.

As in the other tales with oranges in their title, Capuana’s “Golden Oranges” also features the body of a woman as the coveted prize, as the

object of desire. Clearly, however, the oranges in this later Sicilian tale are not just about the woman's body but rather hold a value in and of themselves – ultimately, a monetary value, in this land where oranges form such an important source of income. Basile's and Gozzi's citrus fruit must be cut up and literally undone for the woman to emerge; once the desired fairy is out, the oranges or citrons have expended their purpose, and we never see them again. The girl and the citrus fruit, be it a citron or an orange, are one and the same, and the appearance of the former implies the disappearance of the latter. For Capuana, however, the oranges are the narrative motor, and the point is to keep them whole and fresh – and *not* to exchange them for a woman, however desirable she may be. While it is true that the King of France, posing as an unkempt peasant, uses the theft of the oranges in order to get to the girl, in the end he gets the girl *and* the oranges, and it is not clear what is, of the two, more precious – to either king. The Sicilian king's attachment was to the oranges initially; the oranges themselves are the treasure, and he repeatedly lies in order not to give them up.

Like the various masters in Pitrè's Sicilian legends, so also the king in Capuana's "Golden Oranges" is a deceptive and exploitative one indeed, taking everything from the uncouth peasant in order to retrieve his oranges, and routinely reneging on his promises to let the alleged peasant marry his daughter. This local king is dishonest, greedy, and proud, with no concept of the honour of one's word – at least when given to someone of a lower social status. It is only when the peasant turns out to be the King of France that the Sicilian king comes to believe in sticking to his word and lets him marry the princess. This final agreement carries no negative consequences for the king himself, not even the loss of the orange tree that the princess receives as a dowry. In every way the beloved orange tree at the heart of the tale stays in the family; it is not a movable property, nor would it do well if transplanted to France. In Capuana's fairy tales, as in the novels and short stories of Verismo, the injustice and inequality of the Sicilian social system are exposed and criticized – through, among other things, oranges – but there is little sense of hope and change. As Miele perceptively puts it about Capuana's tales in general, "in the sarcastic description of selfish, dimwitted kings and their power-hungry ministers, Capuana conveys a frustration with the injustice and inequality of the Italian *Mezzogiorno*" (315). No one is punished, and the status quo remains as intact as the golden oranges at the end of Capuana's tale.

In these folk narratives and literary fairy tales, sacred objects such as oranges do not let themselves be turned into commodities, into objects of economic exchange – at least, not always and not right away; the proper rites need to be observed (e.g., awe experienced, property respected, promises kept) if the sacred fruit is to preserve its full value. As we have seen in the case of the commercial with which I opened this section, the story of citrus fruit, in more recent times, also offers examples of a reverse metamorphosis. In Pitrè's and Capuana's stories, oranges are sacred and not available for commodification, whereas in contemporary advertising, blood oranges, now wholly commodified, attempt to regain their status as sacred objects through an emphasis on their "quintessence" and the process known as "singularization." An awareness of the dual nature of oranges and their connection to violence and the sacred helps us to unpack the complicated power relations represented in texts such as Pitrè's and Capuana's, as well as to grasp better the unusual nature of this fruit in some of its more recent appearances.

Sacred Oranges and Immigrant Stories

Giovanni Arnolfini, depicted with his Italian wife in Van Eyck's famed double portrait, was an early migrant from the South, an early modern Italian who made his fortune in northern European lands. Judging from the luxurious elegance of his living room and clothing and from the wholeness of his oranges, it clearly went better for him than it did for Nino in Brusati's film *Bread and Chocolate*, a character who also migrated from Italy to a northern land several centuries later. For Arnolfini, the oranges of his native country resting on the windowsill of his new northern home must have represented a personal and private reminder of where he came from, as well as being a more generally understood and public symbol of wealth – instead of, as for Nino, the occasion for public humiliation.

Not unlike the situation of Giovanni Arnolfini is that of Agata in a television commercial for oranges filmed for the Consorzio Euroagrumi, a consortium of Sicilian citrus producers specializing in blood oranges. After a brief viewing of the Brandenburg Gate that firmly sets the scene in present-day Berlin, we see a dark-haired, attractive young woman bring a large, bright orange to her nose and mouth and inhale deeply, sensuously, while the voice-over (clearly that of an actress, and uncharacteristically devoid of any regional accent) explains: "I am Agata, I am Sicilian,

and I live in Berlin. At times I miss my horizons very much.” (Sono Agata, sono siciliana e vivo a Berlino. A volte mi mancano molto i miei orizzonti.) Agata is a typical Sicilian name: Saint Agatha of Sicily is a beloved early Christian martyr and the patron of the city of Catania, located at the very heart of orange country, at the foot of Mount Etna. In art, Saint Agatha holds a platter with her breasts on it (they were cut off as she was martyred), and this iconography has led to the creation of pastries called *le minne di Sant’Agata* (the breasts of Saint Agatha). Evoking the female body through sex and food, in this commercial for the Consorzio Euroagrumi Agata’s sensuous nostalgia for Sicily’s colours and scents (i colori, i profumi) is indeed quenched by the presence of imported Sicilian oranges in her new northern home, Germany. “Luckily, I have my oranges” (Per fortuna, ho le mie arance), Agata exclaims and proceeds to explicitly and proudly describe Sicilian oranges, and Sicilian citrus fruit generally, as different from – and, implicitly, as superior to – those of the rest of the world: “Oranges are grown all over the world, but mine, those from Sicily, are, for their quality, features, and genuineness, unique in the world. Citrus from Sicily: simply the best in the world.” (Le arance le coltivano in tutto il mondo ma le mie, quelle di Sicilia, sono per qualità, caratteristiche e genuinità, uniche al mondo. Agrumi di Sicilia: unici al mondo.) Sweetness of sex and of fruit, violence, and the sacred are all evoked in this brief television commercial, in which Agata’s statement, “Luckily, I have my oranges,” potentially acquires, in a context that repeatedly feminizes oranges as women, a sensual double entendre.

Oranges hold an ambivalent status in narratives of migration out of and into Italy; they are a nostalgic object of desire for some, but at the same time, and more problematically, they are an unreliable commodity that, like the sacred, can bring about both wealth and loss and sometimes even life and death. Oranges are an icon of southern Italy, and that much is clear in so many texts. Nevertheless, oranges have also been used in Italian literature to mark wealthier lands as places of Italian immigration – not unlike the oranges in Nino’s Swiss restaurant. Among the myths associated with the land of plenty that was North America in particular, we find its produce, believed to be of mythic proportions; still today many European visitors to the United States are struck by how large everything is, from human beings to toilet-paper rolls. Emanuele Crialese, in his 2006 film *Nuovomondo* (distributed to the Anglophone world with the title *The Golden Door*), shows the characters immersed in an imaginary sea of milk with gigantic carrots floating by, to which the swimming humans sometimes cling for safety and rest. As Barbara

Alfano puts it, “in Crialese’s film, icons of plenty are manifestations of desire and accomplishment, signs of an imaginary world, America, that has its counterpart in its geopolitical reality, the United States” (146). So also Cesare Pavese’s celebrated last novel, *La luna e i falò* (*The Moon and the Bonfires*, 1950), features a narrator protagonist who, after returning to his native Northern Italian region of Piedmont after a time spent in the United States, asks himself during a flashback set in California: “Eggs cooked in lard, a good salary, oranges as big as watermelons, these were nothing ... Was it worthwhile to have come?” (*Le uova al lardo, le buone paghe, le arance grosse come angurie, non erano niente ... Valeva la pena esser venuto?*; 16). Abundance is figured in the higher salary of American jobs but also in the size of the country’s citrus fruit – which are not as common in Pavese’s northern Piedmont as they are in Italy’s southernmost regions of Calabria and Sicily, in particular. Indeed, about the one American woman he came close to marrying, Pavese’s protagonist wonders, “What kind of children would have come from the two of us – from those smooth, hard hips of hers, from that blond belly fed on milk and orange juice, and from me and my thick blood?” (*Che razza di figli sarebbero potuti uscire da noi due – da quei suoi fianchi lisci e duri, da quel ventre biondo nutrito di latte e di sugo d’arancia, e da me, dal mio sangue spesso?*; 101). Along with milk and blondness, orange juice is a marker of Americanness, given that Pavese’s protagonist is from Northern Italy and given how much the size and the consumption of oranges in America – squeezed into juice and drunk with breakfast – differ from the culinary habits of the Italian people, who are more likely to consume a (relatively small) whole orange at the end of a meal in lieu of a baked dessert.

In *The Moon and the Bonfires*, Cesare Pavese describes the return to Italy, at the end of the Second World War, of a Northern Italian man who had left his home to seek a new life in the United States. In Elio Vittorini’s literary classic, the short novel *Conversation in Sicily* (*Conversazione in Sicilia*, first published in instalments between 1938 and 1939), orange vendors make a more modest trip, though they make it regularly, from the island of Sicily to Calabria on Italy’s mainland, to sell their goods. “No one wants any ... No one wants any ... As if they were poisoned ... Damned oranges!” (*Nessuno ne vuole ... Nessuno ne vuole ... Come se avessero il tossico ... Maledette arance!*; 582.) With these harsh and desperate words Vittorini captures the plight of the Southern Italian orange pickers in the first half of the twentieth century. These incomplete sentences are the last words that the narrating protagonist, who is on his way to

visit his mother in Sicily from his home in Northern Italy, hears from an orange picker and seller he has just met on the ferry linking Italy's two southernmost regions. Vittorini's book is solidly secular and, in fact, profoundly critical of religion. Its oranges, however, are not solidly secular at all; they are literally "cursed" (maledette) and believed to be – at least metaphorically – toxic, "as if they were poisoned" (come se avessero il tossico). Nevertheless, they are eaten and offered to his young wife in desperation by the orange picker, whose pay and therefore diet consist of oranges alone: "If we don't sell oranges, there is no bread ... and we have to eat oranges ... Like this, you see?" (Se uno non vende le arance, non c'è il pane ... e bisogna mangiare le arance ... Così, vedete?; 581.) The orange seller demonstrates his need to the obviously better-off protagonist by biting into an orange in frustration and with no sign of pleasure at the fruit's taste. Likewise, about today's immigrant agricultural workers in Italy, who have come from afar to work on the orange harvest, it has been written: "They work every day from dawn to sunset in inhuman conditions, performing jobs that Italians don't want to do, eating nothing more than oranges for days" (Antinori 232).

With an adjective that underlines his cultural and economic privilege, Vittorini's narrator reassuringly describes the reviled oranges that his companion is ferrying as "very nutritious" and – to the orange picker's surprise and eager delight – offers to buy some. The dual nature of oranges in this passage, poisonous and life-giving at once, necessary yet dangerous, and thus what we may call, borrowing from Peter Berger's *The Sacred Canopy*, their "quality of mysterious and awesome power" – a quality that is "other than man and yet related to him, which is believed to reside in certain objects of experience" (Berger 224) – suggests an understanding of this fruit as a sacred object or a *pharmakon*, an object that is cure and poison at once – as it was in Catherine of Siena's letter to Pope Urban VI, in which this fruit's ambivalent bitterness could alternately signal salvation or damnation, life or death. This is also the position of oranges in Pitrè's and Capuana's writings, in which these fruits can suddenly turn from gold to snail shells, from agricultural wealth to useless rot, leaving social and physical violence in their wake. In his discussion of sacrifice the French critic and philosopher René Girard, who is best known for his work on the intrinsic bond between violence and the sacred, remarks that "the word *pharmakon* in classical Greek means both poison and the antidote for poison, both sickness and cure – in short, any substance capable of perpetrating a very good or very bad action, according to the circumstances and the dosage" (95). Oranges are

a fruit, after all, on which the economy of southern Italy has long relied, but oranges have not always delivered on their promises of well-being, be it physical or social. To borrow from French ethnographer Michel Leiris's influential characterization, oranges as sacred objects qualify as "something simultaneously attractive and dangerous, prestigious and outcast" (Leiris 24). They are "sacred things ... things set apart and forbidden" (Durkheim 224), and "'wholly other,' something which has no place in our scheme of reality but belongs to an absolutely different one" (Otto 29). In so far as oranges belong to the realm of the sacred, they can underline, in the texts in which they appear, "a replay of a pagan world vibrant with spirit-forces thought to be long since obliterated by what had come to be called the disenchantment of the world" (Taussig 41). These are the forces described in Pitrè's Sicilian ethnography and in Capuana's orange fairy tale, and they return in subtle ways in later and more realistic writings such as Vittorini's.

For at least a century and a half, in texts of Italy's far south, oranges have been regularly represented as both a solution and a problem, by turns toxic and healing, and even occasionally as a metaphor for this very land. When, in July 1860, the political architect of Italian unification, Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour, had to inform his ambassador to France, Costantino Nigra, about the current state of military and political affairs (Garibaldi and his one thousand red shirts, the Mille, had disembarked in Marsala, Sicily, the previous May), his telegram read: "The macaroni are not cooked yet, but as for the oranges that are already on our table, we are quite ready to eat them" (*Les macaronis ne sont pas encore cuits, mais quant aux oranges qui sont déjà sur notre table, nous sommes bien décidés à les manger*; Mack Smith 100). Significantly, Cavour's telegram was written in French, rather than Italian, because the latter was not yet accepted as the language of education and political affairs. In this mis-sive Cavour's oranges represent Sicily, which had already been invaded by the red-clad men of Giuseppe Garibaldi, and the macaroni stand for Naples (where pasta was already a popular fare), a city not yet taken over by the Northern troops. That Naples has not yet been reached is figured in the phrase "the macaroni are not cooked yet," whereas Sicily's impending political allegiance to united Italy is expressed through the control of its symbolic oranges: "as for the oranges that are already on our table, we are quite ready to eat them" (Mack Smith 100). Macaroni and oranges are not just a casual metaphor; historian Franco La Cecla has contended, and they are a more specific reference, even, than to Italy alone: macaroni and oranges assume Italianness to be Mediterranean,

with an identification that Garibaldi's military exploits will actualize at the gastronomic level as well (23).

Italian unification, some claim, was actually the greedy swallowing of the tasty South, figured in its macaroni and its oranges, by a hungry North. Other historians, however, see in these food metaphors the successful efforts on the part of the North to praise and ensure the survival of the cultural traditions of the South, including the agricultural and gastronomic ones.⁷ Both interpretations recognize the crucial role played by cooking and eating in the construction of an Italian identity, and the special position held by oranges in this process. It is no coincidence that oranges are featured throughout the popular 1891 cookbook by Pellegrino Artusi, *La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiar bene* (*Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well*). Artusi's classic tome is often described by historians as one of the more effective instruments of political unification in Italy for its inclusion of recipes and ingredients hailing from the entire new nation. With sweet oranges dominating the citrus markets, and the binary split between sweet and savory dishes more dominant than in centuries past, Artusi includes oranges primarily in sweet dishes and provides recipes for such sweets as orange preserves (*conserva di aranci*; 493), orange ice (*gelato di aranci*; 504), and orange punch (*ponce di arancio*; 498). However, he also includes oranges in the preparation of "Mallard or wild duck stew" (*Germano ossia anatra selvatica in umido*; 211), reminiscent of the medieval custom, based on the theory of the four humours, to pair fruit, cold and moist, with roasted meat, hot and dry.

Vittorini's literary orange pickers in the first half of the twentieth century were Italian "with dark faces" (*scuri in faccia*; 576) and exotic for the narrator in many ways, but nevertheless Italian. In Italy's southernmost plains – the Rosarno area in Calabria has received the most attention from the media for its geography and agriculture (that of the plain of Gioia Tauro), which is comparable to that of the equally fertile plains of Sicily – today's orange pickers are African, hailing from countries such as Ghana, the Ivory Coast, and Burkina Faso. The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have seen Italy transformed from a land of emigration, both internal and external, into a land of immigration. Some media attention has been given in recent years to the tragic shipwrecks off the coast of the island of Lampedusa, for example, and the survivors' traumatic entry into Italian territory. For those who do make it alive to this rocky Italian outpost, landing is just the beginning of a difficult journey that in some cases does not go much farther than Italy's southern tip, with its ever-present need for underpaid farmhands. Thus, many African

migrants find work in those citrus groves of Sicily and Calabria that just a few decades ago had employed the most desperate of Italians.

It was in reading about “i fatti di Rosarno” (the Rosarno events), as they are usually referred to in the media, and the issues that continued to beleaguer their protagonists, that I encountered more than once uncannily pertinent references to Vittorini’s poignant words from some eighty years ago. The orange pickers of Rosarno and the surrounding countryside, most of them from sub-Saharan Africa, work under the table, or *in nero*, for twenty to twenty-five euros per long day in slave-like conditions.⁸ Five euros of their meager daily earnings are spent on transportation, they have no recourse if the boss refuses to pay them, and they are the regular target of violent actions such as beatings, shootings, *gambizzazioni* (shootings aimed at the legs; sadly enough, because of the popularity of this particular crime during the late twentieth century in Italy, the Italian language actually has a word for it), and *sportellate* (the main road has no sidewalk, and passing cars, in sport, hit the walking workers by slamming open the passenger door, *sportello* in Italian, against them – another sadly violent neologism).

Ironically, many of the employers of today’s migrant agricultural workers are the children and grandchildren of those same Italian farmhands who had to fight for their basic labour rights in the 1950s (Di Bartolo 201). “Home” for today’s migrant workers typically consists of abandoned buildings with no electricity or running water. Their health conditions are precarious, with problems including dermatitis caused by farm chemicals, and gastralgia brought on by the fact that “during the citrus harvest they ate up to ten oranges or mandarins per day. Their only food which, in those daily doses and given its acidic juice, obviously can only lead to problems” (durante la raccolta degli agrumi mangiavano fino a 10 arance o mandarini al giorno. Il loro unico cibo che, in quelle dosi quotidiane e con il suo succo acido ovviamente non può che produrre problemi; Arena and Chirico 118). The plight of these workers continues to bring to the public’s attention the issues of undocumented migration, the exploitation of manual labour, and the role played in the local economy by the equally local organized crime, the Calabrian ‘*ndrangheta*.⁹ The extent of the ‘*ndrangheta*’s involvement, and even whether it is involved at all, is the subject of much controversy.¹⁰ These are political and social issues, and many would call them strictly secular, but the terms with which they are evoked in the media, even in the most secular of print and web publications, are often drawn from the vocabulary of the sacred; and the context in which the presence of oranges places these

issues, as well, harks back to the dual, kratophanous qualities of the sacred – dangerous and life-giving at once.

Separated into sections that are enclosed and guarded from each other by a resilient membrane, oranges are grown in gardens, namely, in enclosures or guarded places that are, as their very name suggests and their etymology confirms, separated from the rest of the world and everyday life. The name commonly given to orange groves or orchards in southern Italy is *giardino*, a word that in standard Italian simply means “garden” – specifically a pleasure garden and not a vegetable garden (for which the word *orto* is used instead). Orange groves are called gardens probably because, before becoming a cash crop, oranges were grown in ornamental gardens attached to aristocratic homes – starting with the palaces in al-Andalus, Islamic Iberia. Thus, in Vittorini’s *Conversation in Sicily*, for example, the orange picker insists that he and his co-workers, despite their poverty, are not unemployed; on the contrary, “We work ... In the orange groves ... We work” (Lavoriamo ... Nei giardini ... Lavoriamo; 580). More recently, we can read about these gardens and their role in the traditional local economy: “How do the five thousand Rosarno families live? They have always lived thanks to the ‘gardens,’ the small citrus groves that colour the plain.” (Come vivono le 5 mila famiglie di Rosarno? Da sempre grazie ai “giardini,” i piccoli agrumeti che colorano la piana; Salvaggiulo.) From the word *garden* (which even for Italian readers would be placed within quotation marks when it is used to refer to a citrus grove) comes the word *paradise*, and both words therefore point to the separateness of a sacred space – be it in the mythological and sacred land of the Hesperides or the physical land of southern Italy.

Violence and the Sacred Oranges of Rosarno

Garibaldi, the military leader behind the unification of Italy in the nineteenth century, was known as a lover of oranges. One biography describes his favourite dessert as consisting of thinly sliced candied “wild” oranges (probably referring to bitter oranges) placed on two slices of biscotti drenched in liqueur and covered in dark chocolate (Tecreto 19). In early June 1860, on the verge of the unification of Italy, two Bourbon enemy envoys visited Garibaldi in his headquarters during a battle and found him calmly sitting in an armchair. On another chair placed between his legs they saw several cigars, two or three oranges, and a dagger out of its sheath. When these two enemy envoys, General Letizia and Colonel Buonopane, asked him questions about the terms of a truce, Garibaldi

nonchalantly “took the small dagger in his hand and started peeling an orange” (tolto in mano il pugnaleto si diè a sbucciare un’arancia; Bandi, n.p.). The two officers kept on talking, Garibaldi kept on peeling, and by the time the Bourbon colonel had finished speaking,

Garibaldi had peeled an entire orange and had opened it; then, he skewered an orange section on the tip of the dagger and offered it to Letizia, saying, “For you, General”; then he skewered another orange section and offered it to Buonopane, saying to him, “For you, Colonel.” ... “Very well!” Garibaldi went on, while skewering a third orange section with the dagger.

(Garibaldi aveva mondato tutt’intera un’arancia e l’aveva aperta; ora, egli ne infilò uno spicchio con la punta del pugnaleto e lo porse a Letizia, dicendo, “A voi generale”; e poi ne infilò un altro e l’offrì a Buonopane, dicendogli, “A voi, colonnello.” ... “Benissimo!” ripigliò Garibaldi infilzando col pugnaleto un terzo spicchio.) (Bandi, n.p.)

Garibaldi agreed to the proposed truce, which the Bourbon colonel offered to read even though he had just “placed in his mouth another orange section” (messo in bocca un altro spicchio d’arancia; Bandi, n.p.). As the three military leaders were still negotiating the terms of the truce, they heard the sound of shooting in the distance. The two Bourbon visitors turned pale with fear for their lives, and Garibaldi quietly ordered a ceasefire – even as he, “without losing his composure, continued peeling his oranges” (senza scomporsi, seguitò a sbucciare le sue arance; Bandi, n.p.). Historical documents describe Garibaldi peeling, sectioning, eating, and offering oranges on the tip of his fighting knife. His love of oranges mirrors his love for Sicily and for a united Italy; his sharing of oranges with enemy military officers represents his generosity and largesse; his peeling of oranges in the midst of shots and attacks that leave his interlocutors startled and deadly pale shows his sang-froid and imperturbability, his indisputable courage. Today you can stop into an Italian bar and order a Garibaldi, a cocktail made with bitters and orange juice, reminiscent in its colour and ingredients of Sicilian oranges and the shirts of Garibaldi’s one thousand men.¹¹

The violence in this anecdote about Garibaldi is historically significant yet entirely kept in the background; no one seems to be left dead or even hurt in its wake. The same cannot be said of more recent episodes of violence amid Southern Italian oranges, which have led to the publication of numerous newspaper articles and book chapters. For example, in her

2010 book, *MaliNati*, the first part of which is dedicated to the citrus pickers of Calabria, Calabrian writer Angela Bubba condemns the violence surrounding the orange harvest at Rosarno. Her argument culminates in an extended reference to the 1939 American jazz classic, “Strange Fruit,” a song made famous by Billie Holiday’s interpretation. Bubba describes an imaginary, anachronistic encounter taking place among the orange trees between the agricultural workers in her home region and the American musician who died almost half a century ago.

And the immigrants wait then, they look at the orange trees, because there is Billie Holiday singing under the orange trees of Rosarno ... she says that from those orange trees hangs a strange fruit, this is what her song says, that the trees of this South produce a strange fruit. There is blood on the leaves and blood on the roots. A black body swings in the breeze of this South. In the place where I was born grows a strange fruit.

(E gli immigrati aspettano allora, guardano gli aranci, perché c’è Billie Holiday che canta sotto gli aranci di Rosarno ... dice che da quegli aranci penzola uno strano frutto, così fa la sua canzone, che gli alberi di questo Sud danno uno strano frutto. C’è sangue sulle foglie e sangue sulle radici. Un corpo nero si agita nella brezza di questo Sud. Nel luogo in cui sono nata cresce uno strano frutto.) (Bubba, *MaliNati* 35)

Bubba’s words are reprised on the back of the book, where a single, simple sentence breaks the flat orange-coloured cover: “In this South, in my South, a strange fruit grows” (In questo Sud, nel mio Sud, cresce uno strano frutto). The words of the young Calabrian writer echo those of “Strange Fruit,” a song prompted by the lynching of African Americans, in Bubba’s comparisons of two souths, the Italian south and the south of the United States; of hanging black bodies (whether lynched or compelled to suicide) and hanging fruit (metaphorical, yes, but also literal, for Bubba, as oranges); and of the blood soaking every part of the tree – a poplar in Billie Holiday’s song, and a more vivid and naturally fruit-laden orange tree in Angela Bubba’s *MaliNati*.

The violence surrounding the orange harvest in present-day Rosarno may be better understood by regarding these fruits from the perspective of their history as sacred objects, objects that have been traditionally represented as lethal and life-giving at once, attractive and dangerous, precious and worthless. The sacred overtones of the television commercial advertising the red oranges of Sicily, the quintessential *arancia rossa*

di Sicilia, return regularly in discourse about other oranges – not only in folklore and fairy tales but also in the articles, essays, and books about the oranges of Calabria and the facts of Rosarno. In his introduction to Fabio Mostaccio's 2012 book, *La guerra delle arance* (The war of the oranges), economic sociologist Tonino Perna writes about the Rosarno area: "Among the intense green of the plain, during the fall and winter period, the bright oranges stands out, like colourful ornaments on an immense Christmas tree" (Tra il verde intenso della piana, durante il periodo autunno-inverno, spicca il colore delle arance, come palle colorate di un immenso albero di Natale; p. x) – a culturally accurate simile, as it turns out, given the symbolism of Saint Nicholas and his orb-shaped, orange-coloured gifts. Perna provides an optimistic description of Calabria as the second-largest orange producer (after Sicily) among the twenty regions of Italy, but he promptly corrects the image of feasting and abundance that his sentences evoke by noting, with a reference to oranges from Vittorini's *Conversation in Sicily*, that "it is precisely around oranges, around this precious and cursed fruit, that the social history of this area is woven" (Ed è proprio intorno alle arance, a questo frutto prezioso e maledetto, che s'intreccia la storia sociale di quest'area; Perna x). The joyful religious ritual of a decorated Christmas tree is juxtaposed with the ambivalent "precious" and "cursed" sacredness of oranges: "The orange, a golden fruit rich in precious elements, full of vitamin C, antioxidant, a panacea for the prevention of many illnesses, is nevertheless a cursed fruit for those who produce and pick it" (Arancia, frutto dorato e ricco di preziosi elementi, pregno di vitamina C, antiossidante, una panacea per la prevenzione di molte malattie, eppure frutto maledetto per chi lo produce e lo raccoglie; Perna xi). Perna remains hopeful, however, and concludes his introduction with words that call up the other side of the kratophanous sacred, the benevolent side: "Let's hope that someday, not too far from now, we will be able to say: blessed oranges" (Speriamo che un giorno non lontano si possa dire: benedette arance; p. xii).

That the discourse about the Rosarno oranges should regularly refer to the vocabulary of the sacred cannot be read as casual or coincidental in a context that conjures up curses steeped in ancient religion and folklore (as described for example in Pitre's texts). These curses seem to have materialized in the horror of the orange workers' present conditions. The language drawn from the realm of the sacred to refer to oranges and orange pickers in the popular press focuses on the social and physical violence of which these young men are the victims (they are all men, with an average age of twenty-nine), evoking the moral horror

of witnessing the violation of something sacred; indeed, the sacred presents “normative claims over the meanings and conduct of human life” (Lynch 29), and “the sense of the sacred” has also been defined “as an apprehension of a kind of objective moral fact” (Adams 214). In the first sentence of his Marxist analysis of the Rosarno struggles, Antonio Catalano, a frequent contributor to the website *Comunismo e Comunità* (Communism and community), and not someone from whom one would expect a religious language, calls the rebellion of Rosarno’s immigrants “*sacrosanta*” (sacrosanct), a redoubled description of sacredness – as sacred *and* holy – which the author italicizes for further emphasis (Catalano). The same powerful word, *sacrosanct*, returns twice in Arena and Chirico’s *Dossier Radici/Rosarno*, a collection of both original and reprinted articles (20, 91).

Antonello Mangano’s book of essays is titled *Gli africani salveranno Rosarno* (Africans will save Rosarno). In this title the verb *salvare* refers, thanks to the double meaning of this word in Italian, to both physical safety and spiritual salvation – not unlike Catherine of Siena’s use of oranges as images of health and salvation in her fourteenth-century letter to Pope Urban VI. Likewise, in an article from the Communist daily *Il Manifesto*, journalist Angelo Mastrandrea describes his African cultural mediator in Rosarno as “my coachman in this antechamber of purgatory, whose guests dreamed of a western paradise but border perilously on hell” (il mio cocchiere in quest’anticamera di purgatorio i cui ospiti sognavano il paradiso occidentale ma confinano pericolosamente con l’inferno). That Rosarno is experienced by its migrant workers as a form of hell, “un inferno,” is a recurring metaphor in numerous newspaper articles – starting with Magro’s 2006 “Un inferno chiamato Rosarno” (A hell called Rosarno), also published in *Il Manifesto* (Magro). Eugenio Scalfari’s 2010 editorial in *Repubblica*, “L’inferno di Rosarno e i suoi responsabili” (The hell of Rosarno and those responsible for it), repeatedly echoes this sentiment with words such as *inferno*, *purgatorio*, and even *il giudizio universale* and *l’apocalisse* (hell, purgatory, the last judgment, the apocalypse). Those who come to pick oranges become “invisible” (invisibili; Arena and Chirico 8, 50, 12, etc.), “ghosts” (fantasmi; Arena and Chirico 61), whose situation is experienced by Rosarno as a “wound” (ferita; Arena and Chirico 68, 71, 72, 140).

“Wherever, and however, they originate – heaven, perhaps – [blood oranges] are the most captivating of fruit. Their aesthetic shadings are marvels of natural beauty, matched by an equally distinctive fragrance and ambrosial berry taste,” we read in Hyman’s *Oranges* (43). On the

other side of hell, in this sacred geography of oranges, we find heaven, namely the place most likely to have first produced these desirable fruits. The most memorable slogan of the movement supporting the rights of the African orange pickers of Rosarno derives its power from the dual meaning of the word *cielo*; in Italian it refers to both the physical sky and a metaphysical heaven. So, for example, in Vittorini's text, the narrator surmises that America represents for the orange picker "his own idea of the kingdom of heaven here on earth" (*una sua idea di regno dei cieli sulla terra*; 580), for in twentieth-century Italian literature America was often seen, in Alfano's words, "as the ultimate utopia of self-realization" (4). The slogan reads: "Oranges do not fall from the sky, nor from heaven, but belong instead to the hands that pick them" (*Le arance non cadono dal cielo, ma sono delle mani che le raccolgono*).

Things that fall from the sky are things obtained with great ease, according to this Italian idiom. The expression, however, is used mostly in negative clauses. It means, through hyperbole as well as metaphor, that good things (oranges, in this case) are not a gift from heaven that falls from up high – be it heaven, the sky, or citrus trees – into our lap through no human effort. The slogan was widely disseminated in January 2011, including on a banner placed in front of the Ministry of Agricultural, Food, and Forestry Policies on Rome's orange-tree-lined Via XX Settembre. It was the refrain of a campaign intended to memorialize the events of the previous January 2010, when the best-known "facts of Rosarno" took place: between 7 and 9 January several agricultural workers from countries including Togo, Morocco, Ghana, and the Ivory Coast, were on their way back from the "giardini," the citrus groves where they worked, and were shot and wounded by groups of unidentified locals. These initial attacks led to protests on the part of the victims' fellow workers, with over two thousand immigrants marching into Rosarno a few days later. The protesters clashed with the local police, eventually backed by an armed local population, in a conflict that led to bloodshed on both sides and to the departure of many of the African workers involved (over eight hundred were deported, and a few hundred more just left the area in self-protection; Mostaccio 69–74).

Among other initiatives, the 2011 campaign of remembrance involved a collective picking of oranges in Rome from private and public gardens. Out of these oranges, participants squeezed juice and prepared marmalade that they sold to passersby, with proceeds going to benefit the orange pickers of Calabria. The labels used on the jars read "Arance amare" (bitter oranges); these words objectively describe Seville oranges,

of course (by far the most common oranges on Rome's orange trees because they are hardier than their sweet equivalent), but also, metaphorically and far more poignantly, these words point to the sorrowful stories of those picking oranges in Italy today and to the bitter fruit they must swallow. The metaphor of bitter fruit, so close to the reality of the flavour of oranges, as Catherine of Siena knew well (see my first chapter), has indeed been used to criticize the controversial immigration law known as Bossi-Fini:¹² "Rosarno has perhaps become the place where the Bossi-Fini law has produced its most bitter fruits. A total failure." (Rosarno è diventata forse il luogo dove la Bossi-Fini ha dato i suoi frutti più amari. Un fallimento totale; Stopdrangheta.it and Associazione daSud 30.) In illustrating this slogan, reminiscent of the sky-fallen and heaven-sent manna of the Hebrew Scriptures, the flyers from the 2011 campaign made ample use of the complementary colours of blue for the sky and orange for the oranges. There is also an intense chromatic emphasis on the blackness of the hands and arms stretched towards the blue sky and the oranges within it.

In English as in Italian, orange is a fruit as well as a colour, and it is from this fruit that the mixture of yellow and red takes its name, *orange* (I will say more on this word in my conclusion). So, from a strictly philological perspective, it is literally an oxymoron to advertise Sicilian oranges as "arancia rossa di Sicilia," as in the television commercial described earlier. But the connection of oranges with the colour red, with the colour of blood, is multifaceted and full of contradictions. The red orange of Sicily is also grown in Calabria; it is commonly known in the English-speaking world as blood orange, for of the different kinds of red oranges grown in southern Italy the oldest one is called *sanguinello* – its name clearly derived from *sangue* (blood). In Italy, as I have mentioned already, they are commonly called *arance rosse* (red oranges). But the facts of Rosarno have associated the word *blood* with oranges in ways that go well beyond the fruit's natural and paradoxically red colour, ways that involve violence, sacrifice, and even sacramental connotations – given that, in Roman Catholic dogma, the wine of the Eucharist effectively becomes blood through transubstantiation.

"Cara Kyenge: Blocchi le arance rosse di sangue" (Dear Kyenge: Block the oranges red with blood) is the title of a 2014 newspaper article in the left-wing daily newspaper *L'Unità* addressed to Cécile Kyenge, then Italian minister of integration, by Calabrian writer Angela Bubba, whose longer work I refer to in the opening of this chapter section. Bubba writes about Rosarno's as a situation "which for a long time has been bloodying an exhausted land" (che da tempo insanguina un territorio

stremato) and refers to the 2010 events as a time when some African workers preferred to hang themselves and the survivors had “spirit-possessed faces” (facce spiritate). With her title, Bubba implies that the blood of these workers has contaminated the oranges we eat (or, more likely, drink because most of the Rosarno oranges end up in orange soda) and made them sacred, untouchable, produced in areas that are described as “obscene purgatories” (purgatori osceni) and as in need of “prayers” (preghiere). Blood in this article is the sign of a scapegoating violence, and violence, as René Girard reminds us in his seminal book on the subject, “is the heart and secret soul of the sacred” (31).

Bubba’s image of contamination by blood, described earlier in this chapter and intensified by the redness of Southern Italian oranges, conveys both metaphorical and literal meanings. A strictly literal take on blood oranges informs the protest of January 2010, when actual bloodied oranges were brought to the Palazzo del Senato and nearby Piazza Navona in Rome’s historic centre as a shocking reminder of the orange pickers’ plight. The initiative gives the name as well to the 2010 collection of essays *Arance insanguinate: Dossier Rosarno* (Bloodied oranges: The Rosarno files), which begins as follows:

The blood on the oranges that we brought to the piazza in Rome last January 12 to show that Rosarno is a national problem, is clotted blood. Old blood. It has been flowing for years, without dirtying anyone’s conscience. The dossier “Bloodied Oranges” tries to reconstruct its itinerary and finds that it is not submerged in the least: from December until March, at the same time as the harvest season, that blood flows on a regular basis and in the light of day among abandoned factories, filthy shelters, and the Main Street of “foremen” and insults.

(Il sangue sulle arance che abbiamo portato in piazza a Roma il 12 gennaio scorso per indicare che Rosarno è un caso nazionale, è sangue rappreso. Sangue vecchio. Scorre da anni, senza sporcare le coscienze. Il dossier “Arance insanguinate” prova a ricostruirne il tragitto e lo scopre per niente sommerso: da dicembre a marzo, in concomitanza con la stagione della raccolta, quel sangue scorre puntualmente e alla luce del sole tra fabbriche abbandonate, rifugi lerci e la via Nazionale dei ‘caporali’ e delle ingiurie.) (Stopdrangheta.it and Associazione daSud 9)

The symbolic significance of blood in this excerpt is both political and sacred: the blood on the oranges described here draws its political power from a sacred dimension. Indeed blood, because of its dual

significance of life and death, of health and illness, of wholeness and brokenness, has traditionally been seen as the most sacred of all fluids: “Blood impresses the imagination. Its loss means weakness and death. It can, therefore, easily be identified with strength. But blood also arouses fear and repulsion. It can be a sign of illness and death” (McCarthy 166). The ambiguity of blood is indispensable to its sacredness: “Blood signifies both violent death and the continued life of generations – in warrior blood, menstrual blood, medical blood,” writes art historian Rebecca Zorach; “it is characterized by purity and impurity, disproportion and dissolution, and associated with the flowering and fertility of the earth and the abundant gift of sacrifice, particularly powerfully with that of Christ” (33). A cartoon that circulated on the Internet in connection with the bloodied oranges brought to Rome in 2010 depicts a case of bloody oranges, with a caption reading “A-grumi”; in Italian *agrumi* means “citrus fruit,” whereas *a grumi* means “in clots” (www.insertosatirico.com). Blood, according to this cartoon, is intrinsic to the oranges themselves; it is part of what they are – citrus fruit, clotting fruit, blood oranges, are one and the same sacred object. Placed on sweet oranges, oranges that are meant to be eaten, blood contaminates and transforms a delicacy and an icon of good health into something disgusting and untouchable, something abject, something monstrous for its breaking of boundaries between plant and animal, animate and inanimate. The bloodied oranges are a striking physical accusation, against the Calabrian citrus industry, of having irrigated its gardens with the most sacred of human fluids.

Mangano’s book *Gli africani salveranno Rosarno* holds the hope that immigrant young people will indeed save the town whose socio-economic problems well preceded the arrival of foreigners from afar. This, after all, is what happened in a few nearby Calabrian towns, including Riace. Wim Wenders’s 2010 short film *Il volo* (The flight) captures the mutually beneficial encounter between a town abandoned by Italians who have left for other lands in search of better work, and the numerous refugees and immigrants who have arrived in Calabria from poorer or more dangerous places; these once-deserted villages now teem with life thanks to the newcomers who have made their home there. The sacred properties of local oranges, by turns damning and redeeming, fatal and life-giving, have for centuries affected the lives of those who touch them. The recent shed of immigrant blood for the production of these oranges is just the latest chapter of this citrus story, so often tinged with sacred elements. If Mangano’s prediction is correct, the African orange pickers would not

be the first dark-skinned people to save this area, and the racism of some of Rosarno's most vocal or violent residents should not be extended to the local population as a whole – with its history of deep devotion to, and spiritual dependence on, dark-skinned beings: “Rosarno cannot be racist because it comes from a Black Madonna” (Rosarno non può essere razzista perché viene da una Madonna nera; Stopdrangheta.it and Associazione daSud, 106).

We are reminded with this powerful statement that the beloved protectress of Rosarno is the Black Madonna of Patmos, a powerful, miracle-working wooden statue found on the Rosarno beach over six hundred years ago. Believed to have been worshipped by the followers of Saint John the Evangelist on Patmos and to have been smuggled out of that island during the Turkish invasions of the fourteenth century, this black Madonna is a Byzantine image of the enthroned Virgin Mary holding a baby Jesus in her left arm. The Greek inscription on its pedestal used to read “Saint Mary of Patmos” but was changed to “Saint Mary of the Spasms” during a restoration because of the many miracles with which this statue has been credited (Lacquaniti 481–93; vol. 2).¹³ Like the African workers of Rosarno, this Madonna escaped the dangers of another land and crossed the sea to find refuge and a new home in Calabria, where the colour of her skin set her apart from the local population and gave her special powers: Black Madonnas are miracle-working Madonnas (Moss and Cappannari 320). In Calabria as well, her name was changed from Mary of Patmos to Mary of the Spasms, Our Lady of Violent Suffering (in the Calabrian meaning of the word *spasimi*), adapting a foreign-sounding term to a more understandable, local usage. What defines the sacred nature of this Black Madonna today, and what names her, is not where she may have come from – the island of Patmos on the other side of the sea – nor the foreignness inscribed in the colour of her skin. Rather, what identifies this sacred being and names her is the violent suffering that she has endured and the violent suffering that she, and others like her, help to relieve through the energy and the renewal of her presence. The discourse around the orange harvest in Rosarno, however distant in its violence from a protective Black Madonna and from the most common, present-day understanding of oranges as healthful and life-supporting fruit, brings together diverse aspects of the history of citrus. Its value as a food and as a commodity and its bond to holy people and to aesthetic pleasure are never far from the notions of danger that the orange evokes, particularly in Southern Italian texts.

CONCLUSION



The Colour of the Golden Fruit

It is an often-cited trivia item that the word *orange* in English has no true rhyme. *Orange* is a peculiar word in other ways, as well. The word entered modern English through Middle English, which took it from Old French (*orenge*), which in turn, it is thought, borrowed it from Italian (Catherine's *melarancia*). Ultimately, the word goes back to the Sanskrit *narangah*, as I mentioned in my introduction, through the Persian *naranj*, which eventually became the Italian *arancia* and the French *orange* (Andrews 46). The English word *orange* first appears in the thirteenth century to refer to the fruit. Then, in 1551, a certain Thomas Phillips bequeathed to his cousin his "orange coloured cow": the word *orange* did not yet suffice on its own to refer to a colour, and described a hue closer to rust than to what we think of today as orange (likely due, a critic speculates, to the long voyages that must have certainly dulled the fruit's brightness before it arrived in England; Morton 6). In the case of the word *orange*, then, the name of the colour is derived from that of the fruit, much like the way in which other abstract names for colours, it is supposed, originate from common objects that evolved into standard comparisons (Evarts 128); similar cases in Italian include *marrone*, which means "brown" but also a type of chestnut; *rosa*, referring to the colour pink as well as to the flower, rose; and *viola* meaning "violet," both the colour and the flower. The colour orange was probably not thought of as a colour separate from dark yellow or light red before the introduction in Europe of the fruit

we call oranges. In its early form of *rancio*, the Italian word for orange was used to describe a colour in thirteenth-century documents as well as in Dante's *Divine Comedy* (*Inferno* XXIII.100 and *Purgatorio* II.9) and in the second paragraph of Boccaccio's introduction to his *Decameron*. In both of these literary classics, however, the colour "rancio" likely refers to a golden hue rather than to what we would today call orange proper – namely, a colour that is between yellow and red. Today the most common word for the colour orange in Italian is not the same as the fruit, *arancia*, but, rather, a derivative word that was first recorded in the nineteenth century, *arancione* (which, because of the augmentative suffix *-one*, may also sound to an Italian ear like "a large orange").¹

There are nevertheless parts of the world where ripe oranges are not actually orange in colour at all. In the tropics, for example, oranges are greenish, and, as citrus historian and chemist Pierre Laszlo points out, "the synonymy between the fruit and the color orange is thus seen to be an artifact of the European experience" (Laszlo, caption to plate 18). Oranges such as those from Brazil – a major world producer of this beloved citrus fruit – are green for the same reason that fall foliage in the northeastern United States (and especially in my home state of Vermont) is so much brighter than elsewhere; a distinct alternation between summer and winter weather, and between daytime and nighttime temperatures, is necessary in order for the green colour of chlorophyll to give way to orange dye molecules such as carotenoids. "Citrus fruit in a tropical or subtropical climate devoid of sharp winter-summer alternation tends to remain lime-green – chlorophyll, actually. Citrus fruit growing in a temperate climate with sharply defined seasons first turns orange and tends to redden upon further maturation. This genetic trait has accidentally become selected in the blood oranges of Sicily" (Laszlo 22). Oranges, then, may be red or green as well as the more standard orange.

Green oranges and the peeling they require are featured in the writings of Constance Federica Gordon-Cumming (1837–1924), an indefatigable travel writer from Scotland. In her book *A Lady's Cruise in a French Man-of-War* (1882) she describes the preparation of oranges by local, friendly young women in the village of Neiafu, in the Polynesian archipelago of Tonga, a district that consisted entirely of an orange grove. The "gentle and rather pretty brown girls, with sienna hair" (another colour derived from an object, namely the soil near the Italian city of Siena, Saint Catherine's and Giovanni Battista Ferrari's hometown), who "sat by peeling oranges by the dozen, with which they fed us all incessantly," Gordon-Cumming

writes, must do so for the sake of those hapless Europeans who might otherwise bite into the fruit's "thick green skins." These green oranges "contain so much essential oil, that the mere act of removing them makes the hands very oily and uncomfortable." More than just the unpleasant sensation caused by greasy, sticky hands, however, is at stake when it comes to these green oranges, for the nineteenth-century preferred method of consuming oranges by sucking them just does not work with this type of citrus: "Woe betide the rash and thirsty stranger who puts the green fruit to his lips to suck it, as he might do a golden orange in Europe. For many hours the burning pain of almost blistered lips will remind him of his folly" (40; vol. 1). Peeling an orange for someone else can be an act of care and protection, as it certainly is in this case; and colour variance – green oranges instead of orange ones – signals difference as danger, and even perhaps the danger of difference.

The need for culturally appropriate methods of peeling and consuming oranges, in the case of the green fruit of Neiafu, may be more urgent than it was for Nino in Brusati's *Bread and Chocolate*; the blistering of lips is more immediate, though perhaps more fleeting, than the risk of being fired. Still, the Neiafu women's way of dealing with green oranges is as tied to their gender (in traditional societies, food preparation is generally the purview of women) as it was for the middle-class, Victorian characters in Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *Cranford* (1851–4), whose genteel habits of eating were not compatible with the messy, noisy efforts required for the eating of oranges by sucking them ("sucking," in Gaskell's novel, "was in fact the only way of enjoying oranges").² Thus, Gaskell writes, "When oranges came in, a curious proceeding was gone through," as the novel's female characters "used to rise up, possess themselves each of an orange in slice, and withdraw to the privacy of their own rooms to indulge in sucking oranges" (52–3). Oranges and the indecorous behaviour necessary in order to consume them enjoyably are a source of social anxiety, for enjoying oranges is implicitly incompatible with women's proper performance of their gender. Like Nino in Brusati's *Bread and Chocolate*, these women must hide from the sight of others while in the presence of oranges. Even as women should not be seen sucking on oranges, they are closely associated with this fruit, as we have seen: through sexual imagery of (more or less forbidden) fruit, for example, in or out of the Garden of Eden; through allusions to female body parts (breasts, especially, but also bottoms and, more chastely, cheeks); in the course of reproductive metaphors (such as the biblical "fruit of the womb"); and,

more practically, in their traditional role in food preparation – as in the candying process described by Catherine of Siena, who despite her personal preference for fasting went out of her way and cooked a delicacy for the pope in order to facilitate his conversion.

Like the oranges of Neiafu, the fruit that Catherine of Siena features in her letter needs to be processed before being consumed, though, having been grown in Italy rather than the tropics, this fruit is golden and not green. The Latin botanical name of the bitter orange is indeed *Citrus aurantium* (the golden citrus). While it is true that the word *orange* comes from the Sanskrit and means something else altogether – “a citrus tree” – the sound of the Sanskrit word *narangah* and the Persian *naranj*, once they dropped the initial *n* in some European languages (such as Italian, French, and English), began to resemble the Latin word *aurum* (gold). It began sounding like the name of the precious metal, the colour of which the fruit is thought to resemble, and which, according to Galileo as I mentioned in an earlier chapter, oranges surpassed in terms of worth. Catherine calls her oranges *melarance* (golden apples) and offers some to the current pope, along with her letter, to emphasize the importance of her words and the appeal they should hold for him given our human, inborn sensitivity to the colours of food and our equally inborn preference for foods that are red and orange (Birren 166–7). The golden hue that is the colour of the fruit reflects the precious gold metal that alone matches its value, both physical and spiritual: golden fruit is nutritious for the body as it is beneficial for the soul, its great worth clearly visible in the value of its colour.

Oranges are golden to Italian ears, especially early modern ears. This auditory allusion reinforces their connection, as well, with the golden apples in the Garden of Hesperides of Greek mythology. In Renaissance Latin the orange was known as *pomum aurantium* (the golden apple). Although in English we think of gold as a dark yellow hue, gold holds a deeper connection with orange, an affinity that has been explained by the lack of nobility associated with the colour yellow through the medieval period, and its status “as one of the least pleasurable of individual hues” (Gage 15). Pontano exalts the citrus fruit featured in his poem, probably sweet oranges, as golden, a colour endowing the relatively new fruit with the lustre of ancient myth and classical significance. Basile’s citron fairies, though the fruit from which they emerge is green rather than orange, rely on the redness of blood and, especially, on the bond with Pontano’s golden citrus to acquire their appetizing, desirable hue.

Basile's fairies may emerge from citrons, but they do not resemble this fruit; their colouring is more reminiscent of other sweeter and redder fare – strawberries, for example, as the fairy tale tells us. But human beings have been said to resemble oranges through the very colour of their skin. Brown – that is, the dark value of orange – is mammals' most common colour, and human beings, colour theorist Edith Anderson Feisner claims, "are all orange in its varying forms: adding black equals brown, adding white equals a pale peach color, adding the complement blue results in a dull color, and the addition of warmth or coolness changes the orange yet again. So we see that humanity, whether termed black, red, white, or yellow, is really just a form of orange" (131). Ferrari's citrus treatise, *Hesperides*, likewise goes to great lengths to compare human beings and citrus fruit. Ferrari's book, however, must focus on shape rather than on colour, in part because its author is unable, in the images that accompany his words, to show these similarities; as lavishly illustrated as *Hesperides* is, coloured plates in botanical texts were still a novelty even as late as the nineteenth century (Secord 32), and Ferrari's images are all in black and white. Still, in the verbal descriptions the colour of citrus fruit is crucial, especially when, in the course of the three myths by Ferrari, human beings undergo botanical transformations; Tirsensia's hand, for instance, becomes "a pale citrus colour" as she grasps the fruit that was her son and describes to her daughter the colour that she has become by calling it "golden."

The colour of oranges remained at the heart of their representation beyond the early modern era. In the poem "Mignon" by Goethe (included in this author's novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, 1795–6), the title character is nostalgic for her native Italy when she is abroad, recalling the colour of its "golden oranges," glowing among the "dark leaves" (*The Essential Goethe* 454).³ Some of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales were inspired by what he saw in his 1833 travels to Italy: "Here is all you could wish for in a landscape – the oranges hanging so yellow between the lush greenery; big, grass-green lemons greeted us with their fragrance. –Everything was like a painting" (48). D.H. Lawrence, in *Twilight in Italy* (1916), writes of "burning oranges among dark leaves" and of "a swarm of ruddy oranges" (89). The colour of oranges and their warm brightness have for a long time attracted foreign travellers to Italy, often from the north, and captured their eye.⁴ Their monetary value nowadays, however, captures through more insidious invitations those less-privileged foreigners from the south who come to Italy in search of

work. So also in advertisements and television commercials the colour of oranges helps to market them; because it catches the eye, orange also signals danger and is the colour of warnings – orange is an exciting colour. If oranges are most often coloured orange – although, as we have seen, they are sometimes yellow or green – oranges can also be of a darker colour and called, because of it, red. The *arancia rossa* (red orange) in English is associated with the most symbolic of human fluids; blood oranges are an increasingly popular gourmet citrus fruit, originating in Sicily because its weather includes a sharp night-time drop in temperature: “So it’s cold, not warmth, that sets blood oranges on fire on the Etna plain” (Attlee 93).

As Bruno Munari writes in his tongue-in-cheek essay “Arancia” (Orange, 1963), in which an orange is described with the technical language of industrial products, “the orange is therefore an almost perfect object, in which we find an absolute consistency between form, function, and consumption. Even the colour is just right: blue would be wrong.” (L’arancia quindi è un oggetto quasi perfetto dove si riscontra l’assoluta coerenza tra forma, funzione, consumo. Persino il colore è esatto, in blu sarebbe sbagliato; 10.) Munari is likely referring to Paul Eluard’s famous line, “The earth is blue like an orange” (La terre est bleue comme une orange), in *l’amour la poésie* (1929). Is it to the actual colour of the fruit’s surface that Eluard is nonsensically referring, or do his words evoke the roundness of earth and orange, their shared self-containment of sorts, the blue sweep of the sky surrounding both? It is with these uncertain words for colour and the changing colour of words that this journey through some of Italy’s most significant oranges ends. This, the only food in English that describes itself – through its colour, no less – evokes the warm brightness of the Mediterranean sun, on which it relies for thriving, and the darkness of its inevitable cold shadows, without which it would not acquire the colour that names it. The bitter, sour, and sweet flavours experienced when we taste an orange spill into the complicated stories of this fruit’s past. Catherine’s oranges need candying in order to please the palate, but their original bitterness is required for health and salvation; without the proper balance one could die when eating this fruit. Pontano celebrates with sweet words the golden orbs that dot and identify his land, but they come from the mangled body of Venus’s own beautiful young lover, Adonis; there would be no fruit without the bitterness of this young man’s untimely death. Basile’s beautiful citrus fairies are killed time and again, the thickness of their rind providing little protection against the sour evils of envy. Ferrari is fascinated by his pregnant

citrus specimens, but they are monstrous, and – not unlike Pontano's – they depend on the metamorphosis and bitter death of human beings (an entire family, in fact: son, mother, and daughter) in order to come into existence. More immediate, yet not unrelated to these tragic citrus stories, are the contemporary narratives of the town of Rosarno, where the sweet Calabrian oranges are grown by workers treated as slaves; their blood and the colour of red oranges are, in these stories, one.

Appendix: A Chronology of Oranges

First century	Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses</i>
Second century	Apuleius, <i>The Golden Ass</i>
Fourth century	Saint Nicholas of Myra
Seventh to eighth centuries	<i>Midrash Tanhuma</i>
Eleventh century	<i>Tacuinum sanitatis</i>
1216	St Dominic's gift of the orange tree to Pope Innocent III
1256	Albertus Magnus, <i>De vegetabilibus</i> (<i>Treatise on Plants</i>)
1282	Ristoro d'Arezzo, <i>La composizione del mondo</i> (The composition of the world)
1379	Catherine of Siena's letter to Pope Urban VI
1392?	<i>Le Ménagier de Paris</i> (<i>The Good Wife's Guide</i>)
1400s	Mastro Martino, <i>Libro de arte coquinaria</i> (<i>The Art of Cooking</i>)
1432	Jan van Eyck, <i>Ghent Altarpiece</i>
1434	Jan van Eyck, <i>Arnolfini Portrait</i>
1450?	Paolo Uccello, <i>Battle of San Romano</i>
1465	Bartolomeo Sacchi, called Platina, <i>De honesta voluptate et valetudine</i> (<i>On Honourable Pleasure and Health</i>)
1475–1521	Pope Leo X Medici and the Battle of the Oranges
1479	Bartolomeo Sacchi, called Platina, <i>Le vite de' pontefici</i> (The lives of the pontiffs)
1481	Marsilio Ficino, <i>Contro alla peste</i> (Against the plague)
1482	Sandro Botticelli, <i>Primavera</i>
1483	St Francis of Paola arrives at French court and requests sweet oranges
1495	Cima da Conegliano, <i>Madonna of the Orange Tree</i>
1496	Andrea Mantegna, <i>Madonna of Victory</i>

- 1496–9 Cima da Conegliano, *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints*
- 1498 Leonardo da Vinci, *Last Supper*
- 1500? Hieronymus Bosch, *The Seven Deadly Sins*
- 1500s Teresa of Avila, orange episode
- 1500s Luís de Camões, *Os Lusíadas* (*The Lusíads*)
- 1501 Giovanni Gioviano Pontano, *De hortis Hesperidum* (On the garden of the Hesperides)
- 1502 Giorgione's *Double Portrait*
- 1504 Jacopo Sannazaro, *Arcadia*
- 1505 Raphael, *Boy with Red Hat*
- 1512–13 Joos van Cleve, *Holy Family*
- 1514 Quentin Matsys, *The Money Lender and His Wife*
- 1515 Ulrich von Hutten, against the oranges sold in Rome
- 1520 Joos van Cleve, *Holy Family*
- 1530–5 Titian, *Dinner at Emmaus*
- 1531 Andrea Alciati, *Emblematum liber* (The book of emblems)
- 1557–64 Titian, *Last Supper*
- 1573 Agostino Gallo, *Le vinti giornate dell'agricoltura et de' piaceri della villa* (The twenty days of agriculture and the pleasure of the country)
- 1578 Pierre Ronsard, *Sonnets pour Hélène* (*Sonnets for Helen*)
- 1592–3 Caravaggio, *Boy Peeling Fruit*
- 1600s Giacomo Lubrano, "Cedri fantastici variamente figurati negli orti reggiani" (Fantastic citrons variously represented in Reggio Calabria's gardens)
- 1620 Tommaso Campanella, *De sensu rerum et magia* (On the sense of things and on magic)
- 1620? Giambattista Marino, *Proserpina*
- 1632 Galileo Galilei, *Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi del mondo* (*Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*)
- 1636 Giambattista Basile, "Li tre cetra" ("The Three Citrons")
- 1646 Giovanni Battista Ferrari, *Hesperides, sive de malorum aureorum cultura et usu* (Hesperides, or on the cultivation and use of the golden apples)
- 1700s Pierre-Nicolas Legrand de Sérant, *The Orange Vendor*
- 1715 Bartolomeo Bimbi, *Oranges, Limes, and Lemons*
- 1726 D. Paolo Bartolomeo Clarici, *Istoria e coltura delle piante* (History and culture of plants)
- 1772 Carlo Gozzi, *L'amore delle tre melarance* (*The Love of the Three Oranges*)
- 1786 Laurent Guyot, *The Orange Vendor*
- 1854 Elizabeth Gaskell, *Cranford*
- 1860 Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour's telegram to Costantino Nigra

- 1860 Giuseppe Garibaldi's expedition of the One Thousand Red Shirts
- 1877 George Thurber, "An Orange within an Orange"
- 1882 Luigi Capuana, "Le arance d'oro" ("The Golden Oranges")
- 1882 Jane Aster, *Sensible Etiquette and Good Manners of the Best Society*
- 1882 Constance Gordon-Cumming, *A Lady's Cruise in a French Man-of-War*
- 1886 Giuseppe Pitrè and S. Salomone-Marino, *Archivio per lo studio delle tradizioni popolari* (Archive for the study of popular traditions)
- 1888 Alberto Marinis, *L'amante dei fiori* (The lover of flowers)
- 1889 William McCloskey, *Wrapped Oranges*
- 1889 Giuseppe Pitrè, *Usi e costumi, credenze e pregiudizi del popolo siciliano* (Habits and customs, beliefs and prejudices of the Sicilian people)
- 1890 Pierre Auguste Renoir, *The Orange Vendor*
- 1891 Pellegrino Artusi, *La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiar bene* (*Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well*)
- 1894 Minerva van Wyck, "Fruit as a Good," *Good Housekeeping*
- 1904 Henry James, letter to H.G. Wells
- 1904 Giuseppe Pitrè, *Studi di leggende popolari* (Studies of popular legends)
- 1919 Sergei Prokofiev, *The Love of the Three Oranges*
- 1929 Paul Éluard, "La terre est bleue comme une orange" (The earth is blue like an orange)
- 1930s Discovery of citrus bud mite, *Aceria sheldoni*
- 1932 Construction of the Garden of the Oranges on the Aventine in Rome
- 1936 Lily Thompson Hawkinson, partial translation of Ferrari's *Hesperides*
- 1938 Sam Tolkowsky, *Hesperides: A History of the Culture and Use of Citrus Fruits*
- 1939 Elio Vittorini, *Conversazione in Sicilia* (*Conversation in Sicily*)
- 1950 Cesare Pavese, *La luna e i falò* (*The Moon and the Bonfires*)
- 1951 Jacques Prévert, "Sanguine" (Blood orange)
- 1963 Bruno Munari, *Arancia* (*Orange*)
- 1974 Franco Brusati, *Pane e cioccolata* (*Bread and Chocolate*)
- 2002 Judith Pacht, "Recipe for S & M Marmalade"
- 2004 Nigella Lawson, *Feast*
- 2008 Michael Meyerhofer, "A Plea for the Cessation of Fruit Metaphors"
- 2010 Video commercial for Arancia rossa di Sicilia IGP
- 2010 Events at Rosarno
- 2010 Angela Bubba, *MaliNati* (Badly born)
- 2011 Political campaign titled "Le arance non cadono dal cielo" (Oranges do not fall from the sky)
- 2011 Video commercial for Arancia Rosaria
- 2012 Fabio Mostaccio, *La guerra delle arance* (The war of the oranges)

Notes

Introduction

- 1 For examples of the application of Butler's gender theories to the analysis of ethnic identity, see the essays in Hofmann and Mueller, *Performing Ethnicity, Performing Gender: Transcultural Perspectives*.
- 2 For more on the symbolic and medical uses of pomegranates, see Ruis's article, "Pomegranate and the Mediation of Balance in Early Medicine."
- 3 A citrus specialist notes that, although Theophrastus's use of the term "*melon Persicon* caused considerable confusion in both ancient and modern times ... Theophrastus's description is too accurate to leave any doubt that he is discussing the citron" (Andrews 39).
- 4 The accuracy and realism with which these and other citrus plants are depicted in Roman visual arts suggest that the paintings were done from life, using fresh plants (Andrews 45–6). Indeed, "pollen remains at Pompeii and near Naples confirm that citrus was being grown there, and not merely figured, in Roman times" (Mabberley, "Citrus (Rutaceae)" 482). As Tolkowsky quips, "where else ought we more likely to find traces of these fruits than in pleasure loving, sensual, dissipated Pompei?" (100).
- 5 As Mabberley rightly notes, "the names of both citrus and orange are surrounded by a series of confusions, false etymologies and perhaps puns. From the Classical Latin for a scented coniferous timber has perhaps come the name of the citron and all other citrus fruits. From the Sanskrit vernacular name (also with roots referring to its scent) has come the name for the orange, which has also become the name of a color" (Mabberley, "Citrus (Rutaceae)" 483).

1. Fruit of the Spirit

- 1 *Marmalade*, a word that comes from the Portuguese name for quince, *marmelo* (from the Greek for honey apple, *melimelon*) – the first fruit to be made into a sweet spread – refers in English to preserves made with citrus fruit, whereas in Italian the similar word *marmellata* indicates preserves (jams and conserves, as well as marmalade) made with any fruit, and not just citrus.
- 2 For more on the melon-caused death of Paul II and its interpretation in terms of the history of food, see Montanari, “Cibo ammazzapapi aborrito nel Medioevo,” 89. In a similar vein, food historian Barbara Ketcham Wheaton writes, of Gui Patin’s *Traité de la conservation de santé par un bon régime et legitime usage des choses requises pour bien et sainement vivre* (the second edition of which was published in 1632), that “he was still following the dictates of Galen and the school of Salerno ... he cites a number of people who died from eating melons” (37).
- 3 The narrative of novella number thirty-eight in Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti’s collection *Porretane* (1483) revolves around the high social status of fruit: when the low-born thief Zuco Padella tries to steal peaches from a nobleman’s orchard, he is violently punished with burns so serious that his hair never grows back, and the nobleman yells at him to go and eat food that is more appropriate to his status, such as “turnips, garlic, leeks, onions, and shallots” (le rape, li agli porre, cipolle, & le scalogne; Arienti 112), all of which grow underground and are therefore as lowly as Zuco himself.
- 4 Quoted from an early Italian translation of Platina’s Latin text.
- 5 Some find it helpful to think of the characters from *Winnie-the-Pooh* to visualize and remember the four temperaments posited by humoral theory: Tigger, with his irrepressible enthusiasm and positive approach, represents the sanguine temperament; Rabbit, always scowling and easily annoyed, is clearly choleric; Winnie-the-Pooh moves slowly and calmly and is not subject to the ravages of emotion, because he is phlegmatic; and the ever-despondent Eeyore, for whom no day is a good day, is as melancholy as temperaments come.
- 6 Although it is difficult today to imagine Italian cuisine without them, tomatoes did not arrive in Europe from the New World until the middle of the sixteenth century, and they were only used for ornamental purposes for the following two centuries because they were considered poisonous; tomatoes were first catalogued as a vegetable in 1772 and first included in cookbooks in the following year (Gentilcore 55); and it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that tomato sauce became a popular condiment for pasta (Gentilcore 76).

- 7 According to Ramón-Laca, “there is general agreement that the arrival of the sweet orange to Europe was linked with the activities of the Portuguese during the fifteenth century” (“The Introduction of Cultivated Citrus to Europe” 510), although some scholars believe that sweet oranges were already available in Italy even before the Portuguese made them famous (Giaré and Giuca 16). Calabrese points out that the first written reference to sweet oranges dates from a Sicilian text of the mid-twelfth century (8). According to Tolokowsky, “of all the problems connected with the history of citriculture in Europe none has exercised more the minds of investigators, nor led to the writing of so many pages of worthless conclusions, as that of how, when, and whence the sweet orange-tree, as distinguished from orange-trees generally, first reached that continent” (*Hesperides* 234).
- 8 For more on Teresa of Avila’s relationship with food, see chapter 8, “How to Boil and Fry in God’s Pots and Pans: Teresa of Avila’s Kitchen Secrets,” of my book *The Women in God’s Kitchen*.
- 9 In 1999 American poet Charles Harper Webb published a poem loosely inspired by the history of oranges, titled “The Age of Orange: A History Inferred from Sentences in the ‘Oxford English Dictionary,’” and including references to Saint Dominic’s orange tree in Saint Sabina.
- 10 The Franciscans, notorious early rivals of the Dominicans, also had their own orange tree, planted by Francis of Assisi himself, tradition claims, in the garden by the Church of San Francesco a Ripa in Rome, the first church to be dedicated to the saint who spoke to animals. Francis’s tree, however, never had the status of Dominic’s, and it died sometime before 1880; we read that “the orange tree is dead and the convent of San Francesco a Ripa has been converted into a barrack” (Chérancé xx).
- 11 Orange trees are so crucial to the look of many Roman streets that, when run-down sections of the city undergo renovation, orange trees are often planted; this was the case in 2007 on the Via Merulana on the Esquiline Hill where, in hopes of encouraging the return of what used to be a popular passeggiata in Rome’s centre, streets and sidewalks were repaved around Largo Leopardi, and new bitter-orange trees were planted.
- 12 Oranges grace many of Rome’s cloisters, the most historical of which is the Chiostro dei Melangoli or Chiostro degli Aranci (The Cloister of the Oranges), attached to the Hospice of San Giovanni Battista dei Genovesi. Its design has been attributed to the Florentine architect and sculptor Baccio Pontelli (1450–92), partly for the slender octagonal pillars favoured in Florentine fifteenth-century architecture. Like the one at Santa Sabina, this cloister boasts a botanical first for the Eternal City: a Latin inscription,

still visible on the fifth column to the right of the door, reminds visitors that here the first palm tree of Rome was planted in 1588, by an Antonio Lanza from the Ligurian city of Savona. Georgina Masson cheerfully notes that, in contrast to many unevenly maintained Roman gardens, “here for once the beauty of superb architecture is enhanced by a well-kept garden, filled with orange trees, sweet-smelling herbs and flowers” (446).

- 13 Taste metaphors are prevalent in other languages as well, and in a book significantly titled *Surrounded by Bitterness* we read that “Hebrew has a general system merging taste and evaluation together, so the word for something tasting ‘bitter’ also describes substances that are ‘bad’ or ‘harmful’” (King 328).
- 14 A discussion of the role of food for Christian holy women may be found in my book *The Women in God’s Kitchen*.
- 15 Angela Marini, a Dominican nun in the Convent of Saint Sisto in Rome, who eventually became known as Venerable Mother Sister Colomba Marini (?–1653), was known for her penance and fasting: “Her food sometimes was just a salad or a few bitter oranges” (*Suo cibo a volta era solo un’insalata o qualche melarancia*; Spiazzi 471). A footnote to this contemporary retelling of her story specifies that the original text uses the word *melangolo*, apparently no longer understandable to Italian readers in 1994, and explains that it refers to the “fruit of a typically Roman plant, the bitter orange, which was and still is found both at the Convent of San Sisto and at the Convent of Saints Domenico and Sisto” (*frutto di una pianta tipicamente romana, l’arancio amaro, che si trovava, e si trova, sia a San Sisto che ai SS. Domenico e Sisto*; 471); and the word is present in many place names in Rome – such as *Torre del Melangolo*, *Giardino dei Melangoli*, and *Vicolo del Melangolo* (Tower of the Bitter Orange, Garden of the Bitter Oranges, and Bitter Orange Alley).
- 16 This idea of the knowledge implicit in tasting has been taken up by feminist philosophers of food, for example Lisa M. Heldke, who writes about “bodily knowledge” as “an acknowledgment of the fact that I *know* things literally with my body, that I ‘as’ my hands, know when the bread dough is sufficiently kneaded, and I ‘as’ my nose know when the pie is done” (218).
- 17 It is now believed that variance in the ability to taste and to tolerate or enjoy bitterness has a genetic basis, and also that bitterness “usually indicates some kind of pharmacological function” (Stuckey 205).
- 18 It is worth remembering here that “Catherine’s pervasive preoccupation with the blood of Christ as symbol of all that is embraced within the mystery of redemption is like a dye that colors all of her writings” (Noffke 119).
- 19 This tenet only changed in the modern era with the development in the Renaissance and beyond of the notion of a cultivated, rather than instinctual,

“good taste.” After the medieval period, experts became the only ones able to determine what was good, and therefore what was good for you, as well (Montanari, “Dal gusto gastronomico al buon gusto intellettuale” 45).

- 20 This image of the breast-feeding Mother Church was dear to Catherine throughout her correspondence and appears in many other missives, including her very first letter to Urban VI, letter number 291 (*Le lettere* 111–16). In a letter to Urban’s predecessor, Catherine had specifically written about bitterness and the breast-feeding Mother Church, with a variation related to letter 346 and based on traditional weaning practices: Pope Gregory experiences bitterness at his mother’s breast, just like babies do when their mothers want to wean them by placing bitter substances on their nipples so that the child may become afraid of the bitterness and eventually give up on seeking sweet milk, and learn to settle for solid food (letter 239, 90–5). Bitterness is a test, Catherine had explained to Pope Urban’s predecessor, as she is explaining to Urban now, and just as she once told Gregory to man up and swallow the bitterness of persecution that was necessary in order to get to what was sweet – “don’t be a fearful child but a virile man. Open your mouth and swallow what’s bitter for the sake of the sweet. It would not be appropriate for your Holiness to give up on milk because of bitterness” (non siate fanciullo timoroso ma virile. Aprite la bocca, e inghiottite l’amaro per lo dolce. Non si converrebbe alla vostra santità d’abbandonare il latte per l’amaritudine; 94) – so now she is asking Urban to get going on his process of reform, both of the Church and of himself.

2. The Fruit of Love

- 1 It has been said that Giorgione’s *Double Portrait* is the first representation of someone resting his head on his hand, as if to follow a distant thought; this primacy has also led to the painting being called “the oldest modern picture” (il primo quadro moderno) because it may be the first painting to represent our human search for personal identity through the secret movements of our soul (Pegoraro). For my understanding of this painting I am indebted to Alessandro Ballarin’s essay “Giorgione e la Compagnia degli Amici.”
- 2 Much interesting information about bergamot may be read in the chapter titled “Green Gold: Calabria and the Most Valuable Citrus in the World,” in Helena Attlee’s fascinating book *The Land Where Lemons Grow*.
- 3 The hollowed-out peels of bitter oranges, for example, were used as lanterns in Rome, as described by the 1695 classic of Roman-dialect poetry, Giuseppe Berneri’s *Meo Patacca*: clay pots hold plants with “halved and hollowed-out

bitter oranges, put back together in such a way that the eye does not see the deception, and they have nothing but their peel. Each pot holds several, and a little light is inside each, shining through because the peel is so thin, almost to the point of breaking – and yet able to stay whole. Some of those who pass by, as they approach, stop, and can hardly believe that what they see is real peel; rather, they think they are wax oranges.” (Questi per mezzo forno già spaccati,/Poi voti, e ricongiunti in modi tali,/Che l’occhio non s’accorge dell’inganno,/E fuori che la coccia, altro non hanno./Ne tiè molti ogni vaso, e un lumiccino/Ce sta inserrato, e questo assai trasparente,/Perché la coccia è assottigliata inzino/Che non si sfonna, e che può intiera stare./Più d’un, che passa, quanno gl’è vicino/Si ferma, e non si può capacitare/Che quella, che vede sia coccia vera,/Ma li stima merangoli di cera; Berneri 245–6.)

- 4 For a thorough overview of melancholia in the ancient world, early Christianity, and the medieval and early modern periods, see the three essays by Toohey; this critic notes that the kind of depressive lovesickness prominent in modern times was very uncommon in antiquity, and it was “discovered” in the early imperial era (“Love, Lovesickness, and Melancholia” 275); before then, lovesickness commonly displayed itself in ways that were violent or manic, rather than depressive.
- 5 In early modern England, too, oranges were associated with women and sensual love. In Restoration London young women with baskets of oranges used to wander the theatres selling their own body along with the luscious oranges they similarly displayed; they were the “Orange Girls,” who worked for more powerful and older women known as the “Orange Molls.” As we can read in a brief article on oranges in Shakespeare’s *Much Ado about Nothing*, “the association between oranges and love or lust appears to have had some emblematic currency in the Elizabethan period” (Madelaine 491).
- 6 About a century later Jean de La Fontaine, in his 1669 *Amours de Psyché et Cupidon*, wrote: “Orange trees, trees that I love,/How sweet your scents seem to me!/Is there, in Flora’s empire,/Anything as pleasant as yourselves?/Your fruits, with their hard rind,/Are a true treasure;/And the garden of Hesperides/Had no other golden fruit.” (Orangers, arbres que j’adore,/Que vos parfums me semblent doux!/Est-il, dans l’empire de Flore/Rien d’agréable comme vous?/Vos fruits aux écorces solides/Sont un véritable trésor;/Et le jardin des Hespérides/N’avait point d’autres pommes d’or; La Fontaine 8.)
- 7 Some pictorial representations of the judgment of Paris arguably display oranges, and not apples, as the fruit in question; see, for example, the

judgments of Paris by Jean-Baptiste Regnault (1820), Joseph Auber (1819), and François-Xavier Fabre (1808).

- 8 In medieval times some thought that the fruit of Eden was not an apple at all but a fig – as in the illumination of the Codex Aemilianensis (ca. 994) depicting *Adam and Eve and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil*.
- 9 There are other explanations for this term, including the following: “According to Porta ... lemons were also called ‘Adam’s apples’ because Adam was said to have been attracted by the beauty of the fruit and to have eaten it, whereby he was expelled from Eden – I wonder whether a confusion was made here with the orange tree, which was depicted by many Renaissance artists in scenes of the Expulsion from Paradise. The source of Porta, not quoted by him, was Albertus Magnus, who called the lemon tree ‘Pomarius Adae,’ identifying it with the Tree of Knowledge” (Levi D’Ancona 206).
- 10 Van Eyck’s *Ghent Altarpiece* is the first major oil painting in history, and – interestingly – the subject of the most attempts at theft; thirteen such attempts have been made, by Charney’s estimation, which is all the more stunning given that this triptych is about the size of a barn wall (x).
- 11 Among the contenders as botanical protagonists of the affair between the first two humans, there is also a citrus fruit that was known for a time as the “forbidden fruit”; its Latin name, *Citrus paradisi*, means “citrus of Paradise.” We know this as the grapefruit, a hybrid between the pummelo (*Citrus grandis*, also called shaddock in some parts of the world) and the sweet orange (*Citrus sinensis*); the grapefruit was first documented in Barbados in 1750 and constitutes therefore the most recent addition to the citrus family. From all my reading on the subject, most writers do not seem to know – or, which is more puzzling, they do not seem to care – why the grapefruit was called the forbidden fruit. In an 1896 essay, republished in 1906 by the *Bulletin of the Jamaican Department of Agriculture*, Daniel Morris explains in passing that “the name forbidden fruit (from a fancied connection with the Garden of Eden) is tolerably old in the West Indies” (38). More prosaically, it has been advanced that “it was first named ‘forbidden fruit,’ probably because of bitterness” (Attokaran 58).
- 12 Citrus fruits were regarded as symbols of purity also in theological treatises and not only in artworks. This is the case, for example, in the anonymous pre-twelfth-century Byzantine text titled *The Symbolic Garden*, in which the purity of the lemon is expressed by the fact that just as this plant keeps its leaves, so also virtue, in order to preserve the body from sin, must keep its words and thoughts wise; the thorns defending the plant are like the good habits that defend purity from temptations; and the light yellow colour of

the lemon is comparable to modesty, for which a simple ornament is most fitting – better, for example, than red, which is considered immodest. Even the sound of the plants blowing in the wind shows them being moved by divine inspiration – the lemon produces a sound that is more distinct and clear than that of other plants, the treatise claims (Tagliolini 1–2).

- 13 By extension, orange blossoms signalled female sexuality, which is the way they are used in Luigi Capuana's 1892 novel, *Profumo*: the young female protagonist's skin exudes a strong orange-flower scent, which is interpreted as a hysterical reaction to her husband's inability to satisfy her (sexually and otherwise) because of his oedipal attachment to his mother (see Mazzoni, "What Should a Woman Smell Like?").
- 14 Despite the dream's apparent theme of romantic love for a woman and suffering at her loss, the most common interpretation has Sannazaro's orange tree stand for the house of Aragon; Sannazaro was in exile from Naples, which had been divided between France and Spain, and the cut-down orange tree figures the descent of Charles VIII of France to Italy.
- 15 For an excellent poetic analysis of Pontano's works, with a special emphasis on his penchant for the representation of metamorphosis, see Casanova-Robin.
- 16 "In Antiphanes' *The Boeotian Girl*, written in the fourth century B.C., a young man presents a citron to his mistress, and she says, 'I thought it came from the Hesperides, / For there they say the golden apples grow.' Other Greeks, it appears, thought that the golden apples were quinces ... In Rome, however, universal agreement seems to have been reached that the golden apples were citrus" (McPhee 66).
- 17 In his treatises the Rome-educated, African King Juba II (who received from Augustus the Kingdom of Mauretania in 25 BCE) "may have identified the famous apples of the Hesperides with a product of his country, the citron" (Totelin 137).
- 18 For this argument see Germano's long article on the topic: "Thus, we owe to an entirely studied and self-aware intellectual operation by one of the most refined and eclectic exponents of Italian humanism the foundation of the classicizing image of the grandeur and magnificence of Naples that we all know, with its glorious world of culture and with its own mythic golden age" (Così, dobbiamo ad un'operazione intellettuale del tutto studiata e consapevole di uno dei più raffinati e poliedrici esponenti dell'umanesimo italiano la fondazione dell'immagine classicistica della grandezza e della magnificenza di Napoli che tutti conosciamo, col suo glorioso mondo di cultura e con una sua mitica età dell'oro; 2).

- 19 It has been claimed that “fairy tales are at their core about sexuality – about the codes and manners and qualities and behaviors that society deems desirable, and thus make us desirable to each other” (Orenstein 211), and that a central theme of this genre is “the (conscious and unconscious) manifestations of human beings’ erotic dispositions” (Seifert 849). “Folktales and fairy tales are stories about and of desire,” fairy-tale specialist Cristina Bacchilega also reminds us; “at the very least, within the world of the tale, they act narratively on a perceived ‘lack’” (“Preface” 13).
- 20 The ATU Tale Type Index is the best-known and most common method of classifying Indo-European folk-tales; it is named after folklorists Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson and was revised by Hans-Jörg Uther.
- 21 Gozzi’s play is both a complicated fairy tale and an insistent critique of his contemporary colleagues, Carlo Goldoni (personified in an evil magician, Celio) and Pietro Chiari (personified in the wicked fairy Morgana, the same Morgan le Fay of the Arthurian tradition), whose modern, realistic, and French-inspired works threatened to displace the traditional and whimsical Italian *commedia dell’arte* of which Gozzi was a staunch defender (Gozzi belonged to the *Accademia dei Granelleschi*, which was devoted to the preservation of traditional Italian literature from the influence of foreign cultures). This is the only one among Gozzi’s theatrical fairy tales for which he wrote the basic plot or *canevas* in the *commedia dell’arte* tradition. After *The Love of Three Oranges* Gozzi went on to write nine more theatrical fairy tales or *fiabe* – including the renowned *Turandot*, from which Puccini drew the libretto for his famous opera.
- 22 Prokofiev himself wrote the libretto by adapting a Russian translation of Gozzi’s text and introducing surrealist elements. *The Love of Three Oranges*, opus 33, premiered in Chicago in 1921 and was directed by the composer himself and performed in French (Prokofiev’s English was inadequate, and a performance in Russian would not have been acceptable to American audiences). Abandoned in the United States until 1949, when the New York City Opera resurrected it with great success, *The Love of Three Oranges* is now part of the standard repertoire of many opera companies.
- 23 As literary critic and Basile specialist Nancy Canepa notes, “the beginning of the seventeenth century witnessed the emergence of dialect literature in many areas of Italy. In the case of Naples, one of the centers of this production, even though dialect literature had existed for several centuries it was only now that a corpus that could rival the ‘Italian’ tradition in artistic complexity was born, thanks to the efforts of Basile and his contemporaries” (“Entertainment for Little Ones?” 43).

- 24 Isaac also surmises that the disappearance of all citrus fruit other than the citron was due to religion: “In the anarchy following the fall of the Roman Empire there was no group to whom the cultivation of oranges or lemons was of vital interest; the citron alone continued to be grown without interruption, and frequently in the face of great difficulties, because it fulfilled the religious obligations of one segment of the Mediterranean population” (185).
- 25 Interestingly, although the Hebrew Bible and most of its translations remain vague about the identity of what is generically referred to as “the fruit of the goodly tree,” there are Italian translations that specify that such fruit is none other than a citron: “I am not aware from what authority this translation was obtained, but it is remarkable that the Italian Bible should mention by name the fruit used for ages by the Jews, who themselves attribute the selection of that of the ungrafted citron tree, simply from its resemblance in shape to the human heart, and from its fine odor” (“The Citron in Commerce” 178). This linguistic oddity can be confirmed by perusing any Italian Bible from the nineteenth century, and the Internet makes this an easy task. For example: “And on the first day, take the fruit of the citron” (E nel primo giorno prendetevi del frutto di cedro; Levitico 23.40; *La Sacra Bibbia* 110). This translating choice may be due to the fact that, although there is no specific mention anywhere in the Bible of any citrus fruit, an Aggadic legend posits the citron as the very tree of the knowledge of good and evil as described in Genesis (Urubshurov 126). For Jews living in early modern Europe, Italy was the source of the ritual citron, as attested by a number of sources dating from the fourteenth century onwards (Isaac 73); at the time of his writing in 1959, Isaac notes the considerable role played by religion in the location of Mediterranean citron groves, although most of the citron production was by then used for candied citron peel (78).
- 26 That citrons in particular should be offered is due not only to their importance in Jewish ritual but also, and perhaps especially, to their persistent association with love and sex, which they eventually shared with other citrus fruit and which led them to being used for adorning bridal chambers, both by Jews in Roman times and, curiously, in Japan (Tolkowsky 19).

3. The Fruit of the Womb

- 1 See Moore (132) and Schiebinger (“The Sexual Life of Plants” 123). The traditional association between women and flowers, the importance of illustrations, and the relative simplicity of the new taxonomic system led to a considerable, and “worrisome,” presence of women among the early botanists: “There was some concern that since the Linnaean system was

based on the sexual characteristics of plants, it might offend delicate sensibilities. In Britain, ‘desexualized’ texts were created for female audiences” (Goodwin 17).

- 2 This partial translation was a master’s thesis presented in southern California (a land of oranges, as the translation reminds us) at Claremont College in 1936 by a woman named Lily Thompson Hawkinson. Owing to the frequent and serious mistakes in Hawkinson’s translation, I provide an English version of Ferrari’s Latin made by John Cirignano and me.
- 3 The mothers of these two young women envy the prolific nature of the plants – a rosemary bush and an apple tree, respectively – and wish to give birth, if not to a girl, then at least to a plant. Basile’s “Petrosinella,” with a different narrative turn, takes her name from a birthmark on her chest that is shaped like a sprig of parsley and was caused by the fact that her mother, while pregnant with her, desired to eat parsley to the point of recklessly stealing some that was growing in the garden of a neighbouring ogress; like in the later and more famous “Rapunzel,” the greedy pregnant woman is forced to give up her daughter to the fearsome garden owner.
- 4 Oranges as women’s breasts are more subtly evoked in American artist William McCloskey’s *Wrapped Oranges* (1889), painted during the California orange boom of the 1880s; the crinkled-white-paper wrapping resembles human clothing, with two oranges “naked,” two fully wrapped, and two in varying states of undress – one of which, in particular, with its prominently centred stem end, resembles a human breast complete with nipple: “The detail has a subtle sexual violence, a disturbing exposure of the body that alludes to both a dissection and a disrobing. Are we meant to read the torn paper ... as skin or garment? Should the orange be seen in terms of anatomy – a breast displayed – or as flesh cut open?” (Raab 13).
- 5 In addition to figs, peaches seem to be a favourite female botanical metaphor. In English the expression “she’s a peach!” is used to describe a lovely woman (this expression is not commonly used to refer to men). In Italian, smooth and round cheeks are *guance di mela* (apple cheeks); a good skin is *pelle di pesca* (peach skin). *Orange-peel skin* (pelle a buccia d’arancia), conversely, describes the dreaded dimples of cellulite, most often appearing on one’s buttocks and thighs. A few years ago Playtex circulated an advertising campaign for wet wipes, addressed to women, marketed as useful before and after sex, and eloquently named “fresh & sexy.” One of the ads in the series featured a caption that read “A clean peach always gets picked,” appearing next to a plump, rosy peach that was still on its leafy branch – cheekily exploiting the association between the female body and fresh, round fruit. Steve Miller Band’s 1973 song “The Joker” evoked the

shape of female breasts in its praise of clearly metaphorical peaches, shaken from the tree that is the woman's body: "You're the cutest thing I ever did see / Really love your peaches, want to shake your tree" (this line has a long history in popular music, appearing in a number of songs starting in 1914).

- 6 The history of oranges includes more or less famous medical anecdotes. Thus, in explaining the famous case of Anna O., Sigmund Freud's associate Josef Breuer describes how "one had only to hold up an orange before her eyes (oranges were what she had chiefly lived on during the first part of her illness) in order to carry her over from the year 1882 to the year 1881" (*Studies on Hysteria* 33). So also, of a patient unable to love a woman who does not peel oranges for him and who cannot take his mother's place, a psychologist writes, "If a woman peeled an orange for him, it showed that they cared for him. Then he said that his mother used to do it for him, even when he could do it for himself" (Hollway 96).
- 7 "Hugh of St. Victor in the *Magnificat* says that all generations shall proclaim Mary blessed, because by the fruit of her chaste womb, they recover the blessings lost by the fruit eaten in paradise" (Gentilucci 191). What Ferrari calls "fruit of paradise" (*pomum Paradisi*) is a kind of lemon that seems to have no connection to Eden, at least in Ferrari's description of it in his third book; rather, this fruit takes its name, in Ferrari's view, from its delicious taste: "It obtained its attractive name (it is my opinion) from the pleasantness of its flavour" (*Saporis iucunditas [ut mea est opinio] speciosum iis nomen obtinuit*; Ferrari 305). The fruit of Paradise, however, is appropriately followed, in Ferrari's pages, by the description of Adam's fruit, "*Pomum Adam*" (Ferrari 309).
- 8 Varriano also argues that "the erotic still life was the invention of the Italian Renaissance. Its off-color wit was perhaps the perfect metaphor for the culture of post-Reformation Rome, a culture whose quest for religious and political orthodoxy frequently led to further uncertainties, and where humor alone offered an acceptable outlet for transgressive desire" ("Fruits and Vegetables as Sexual Metaphor" 11).
- 9 On Basile's interest in science and its manifestation in his *Tale of Tales*, see Magnanini, *Fairy Tale Science*. Ferrari's own fascination is confirmed by the collection of his collaborator, Cassiano Dal Pozzo: "Dal Pozzo's archive delights in nature's propensity to 'joke.' His paper cabinet is filled with images of 'pregnant' or double fruits ... The image of a pregnant citron-lemon highlights the empirical techniques associated with citrus investigations. Visible is an artificial 'window' cut in the fruit's rind to reveal the second fruit embedded within" (Zytaruk 9).

- 10 Mabberley notes: “In his *Species plantarum* (1753), Linnaeus united all of the citrus known to him in one genus of two species: *Citrus medica* L., the citron, with var. *limon* L., the lemon and *C. aurantium* L., the orange with var. *grandis* L., the pomelo, and var. *sinensis* L., the sweet orange” (“A Classification for Edible *Citrus*” 168). Recent genetic research into the origins of the various types of citrus has furthermore determined that lemons (*Citrus limon*) and bergamot (*Citrus aurantifolia*) are derived from the cross of citron (the paternal parent, *Citrus medica*) and sour orange (the maternal parent, *Citrus aurantium*); that grapefruit (*Citrus paradisi*) comes from the meeting of the pummelo (*Citrus grandis*) and the sweet orange (*Citrus sinensis*); and that the sweet orange and the sour orange are both hybrids of mandarin (*Citrus reticulata*) and pummelo (Li et al. 341).
- 11 For more on the “long s,” see Nesbitt 78–9. Although today we commonly speak of plants or parts of a plant as gendered, this was not always the case. “The supposition that there are indeed male and female plants, that there are two sexes that join together for the purposes of reproduction” is an idea that in the eighteenth century was “the subject of heated debate, being only partially confirmed by miscellaneous observations of plant fertilization”; unlike animals, “plants rarely convey a clear picture either of male and femaleness – most flowers possess both sets of organs – or of sexual reproduction at all, since plants are quite capable of propagating their kind by purely vegetative means, and it is hard to know which part of the organism might count as a sexual individual” (Browne 596).
- 12 I discuss at length this theory in the third chapter of my book *Maternal Impressions*, which includes a discussion of “Petrosinella” (the earliest known version of the Rapunzel story), Basile’s fairy tale with maternal cravings and impressions at its heart.
- 13 Even in the modern science of embryology, in some ways the descendant of teratology, elements of this anxiety remain, and a focus on the dangers of dwelling in the mother’s pregnant body is still very much a part of the discourse around pregnancy – except that, instead of vague visual or emotional impressions, today’s science identifies as teratogens things such as infections (toxoplasmosis and rubella, for example), maternal diet (low levels of folic acid being the best-known issue), maternal drugs (for example, thalidomide in the 1950s and 1960s, which led to the birth of children with missing or severely deformed limbs), and the environment (both external and internal to the woman’s body, such as radiation and maternal diabetes and stress).
- 14 Feminist philosopher Nancy Hartsock extended the deconstruction of boundaries characteristic of pregnancy to female physiology in general:

“There are a series of boundary challenges inherent in the female physiology – challenges which make it impossible to maintain rigid separation from the object world. Menstruation, coitus, pregnancy, childbirth, lactation – all represent challenges to bodily boundaries” (294).

- 15 As David Freedberg remarks about Federico Cesi, one of Ferrari’s contemporaries and colleagues, “one of Cesi’s great breakthroughs was his clear-headed realization that the problem of the ambiguous or borderline or intermediate case would only be resolved by close attention to the reproductive systems of plants. In this respect he was one of Linnaeus’s most important predecessors” (“Series B” 40).
- 16 “In his book *Hesperides sive de malorum aureorum cultura et usu* (Rome, 1646) Ferrari illustrated the metamorphosis of a nymph [*sic*] called Harmonillus into a citron tree. I have reproduced a detail from his engraving above. Harmonillus’s feet are rooting to the ground while her [*sic*] fingertips are turning into branches bearing citron fruit. The citrons growing out of her [*sic*] hands are quite unlike the common citron illustrated above. They are multi-lobed and possess finger-like lobes. Varieties of citron which had this aberrant hand-like form were common in seventeenth century Europe” (Day).

4. Strange Fruit

- 1 Numerous paintings and icons featuring Saint Nicholas, often holding three globes, may be found at <http://www.stnicholascenter.org/pages/art/> (accessed September 2017).
- 2 In an article on oranges in English-language children’s literature James Everett notes that “it is certainly not difficult to find thousands of Christmas orange stories,” even as he notes that he is “in one of the last generations whose members have heard firsthand accounts of Christmas oranges or who have actually received oranges for Christmas” (203–4).
- 3 A similar battle of the oranges still goes on today in the Northern Italian city of Ivrea, an annual re-enactment celebrated with fruit imported from Sicily. “One can readily understand the selection of the orange, a solar fruit symbolic of both golden light and opulence, as an emblem of Italian Carnival. The occasion is a festival celebrating the return of light at the end of winter, the burning away of the cold months; it is also a festival of fertility, helping to ensure a plentiful harvest and the fecundity of women” (Laszlo 134).
- 4 An entire article was published in 1955 on the presence of oranges in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Flanders: a luxury item, for that time and place, oranges were recommended in a letter to the sick French king

of France, Charles VI, in 1421, revealing that oranges arrived in Flanders from southern countries (Spain and Portugal, most likely) via sea and were sent to Paris from Flanders (Bril and Lejour 56–7).

- 5 The Last Supper was a Passover seder, and it is relevant to note here that Passover meals in present times often include an orange as a symbol for women and their importance to the Jewish faith and tradition; conceived by Susannah Heschel, this practice began in the early 1980s and has been adopted by many Jewish feminists and their families (Zylberberg 149).
- 6 The image of the rotten oranges has returned in the reality of contemporary Southern Italian agriculture. For a time it was more financially expedient to let oranges rot on the tree than to pick and sell them: “The majority of oranges, at the end of the 1990s, was left to rot on the trees and their selling price did not even cover the cost of producing them” (Gran parte delle arance fu alla fine degli anni novanta lasciata marcire sugli alberi e il loro prezzo di vendita non copriva neppure il costo di produzione; Di Bartolo 197).
- 7 For a taste of the controversy surrounding the Italian unification see, for example, Petacco’s *Il regno del nord*, a book that significantly uses Cavour’s quotation about the not-yet-cooked macaroni and the oranges on the table as its epigraph, and titles its seventh chapter “Cavour’s Oranges and Macaroni” (“Le arance e i maccheroni di Cavour”).
- 8 There are objections to the charge of exploitation of immigrant labourers, of course: “Twenty-five euros is the minimum wage; it is a poor pay, but this is a poor economy. There is poverty, not exploitation ... Market prices are now lower than production costs.” (Venticinque euro è il minimo salariale: è una paga misera, ma questa è un’economia misera. C’è miseria, non sfruttamento ... il prezzo di mercato è sceso al di sotto del costo di produzione; Arena and Chirico 141.) “In other places, \$30 is not a living wage. But this is one of the poorest parts of Italy, and many local people do not earn much more, even if most will not pick fruit” (Donadio).
- 9 “The criminal organization known as ‘Ndrangheta ... is settled in Calabria, and today is considered the strongest and oldest Mafia organization in Italy after the Sicilian Mafia. Although it has its roots in one of the poorest regions of the country, over time it has become the richest and most powerful Mafia group, at least in Italy” (Serenata 2).
- 10 Compare, for example, Stopdrangheta.it and Associazione daSud, *Arance insanguinate: Dossier Rosarno* (2010), and Fabio Mostaccio, *La guerra delle arance* (2012).
- 11 Garibaldi’s famed one thousand men, *i Mille*, stormed Bourbon-ruled Sicily in 1860 and, after landing in the coastal city of Marsala in May, began in

earnest the unification (or, according to a different interpretation, the colonization) of the Italian peninsula, eventually completed with the declaration of the Kingdom of Italy in March 1861 under the leadership of Victor Emmanuel II of Savoy. Garibaldi's thousand or so men all wore red shirts – shirts that were actually, as far as I can see, bright orange, as is the Garibaldi damselfish (*Hypsypops rubicundus*, the official marine state fish of California), which takes its name from the colour of those very shirts.

- 12 The law known as *legge Bossi-Fini*, from the last names of the two right-wing ministers who were its primary supporters, is a much-contested immigration law from 2002; some Italian courts have even requested that it be declared unconstitutional because of its harshness.
- 13 For a study of Black Madonnas in Italy see Chiavola Birnbaum's seminal book *Black Madonnas*.

Conclusion

- 1 For more on this topic, and specific references to early documents attesting the use of *arancio* as a colour, see <http://www.accademiadellacrusca.it/it/lingua-italiana/consulenza-linguistica/domande-risposte/si-dice-arancio-arancia>; and <http://www.accademiadellacrusca.it/it/lingua-italiana/consulenza-linguistica/domande-risposte/marrone-arancione-invariabili> (accessed September 2017).
- 2 Henry James, in a letter dating from 1904, also used the metaphor of orange sucking when complimenting the short stories of H.G. Wells: "They were each to me as a substantial coloured sweet or bonbon ... Some of the colours seemed to me perhaps prettier than the others, as some oranges are the larger and some the smaller, in any dozen. But I (excuse me!) sucked *all* the oranges" (304; vol. 4; emphasis in the original).
- 3 Oranges make other appearances in Goethe's oeuvre, as in his 1789 poem "To His Coy One" – "And there I say: Oh Orange, / Thou ripe and juicy Orange, / Thou sweet and luscious Orange, / I shake the tree, I shake it, / Oh fall into my lap! (*The Poems of Goethe* 97) – and in his loosely autobiographical novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774). In the latter the narrator describes how the beloved Charlotte "felt refreshed by partaking of some oranges which I had secured, – the only ones that had been left; but at every slice which, from politeness, she offered to her neighbors, I felt as though a dagger went through my heart" (23); this memorable scene, in which the orange sections stand for Charlotte herself, is quoted by Roland Barthes in the chapter titled "The Orange," of his *Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, to show how difficult it is for a lover to share his beloved (110–11).

- 4 A similar, earlier literary reference to oranges as marked by their colour in travel literature from a northern author, though not referring to Italy, may be found in Andrew Marvell's "Bermudas": "He hangs in shade the orange bright, / Like golden lamps in a green night" (Jehlen and Warner 544).

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